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ALPHONSE DAUDET

S A P H O

PARISIAN MORALS

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**FOR MY SONS
WHEN THEY ARE TWENTY
YEARS OF AGE**

SAPHO

CHAPTER I

"COME, let's look at you, I like the colour of your eyes. What's your name?"

"Jean."

"Jean—nothing else?"

"Jean Gaussin."

"You're from the South; I can hear that. How old are you?"

"Twenty-one."

"An artist?"

"No, madame."

"Ah! So much the better."

These scraps of talk, somewhat indistinct amid the shouts, the laughter and the music of a masked ball, were exchanged one June evening, between a pifferaro and an Egyptian peasant-woman, in the conservatory which, with its palms and tree-ferns, formed a background to Déchelette's studio.

To the earnest questioning of the Egyptian woman the pifferaro replied with the frankness

of youth, and the freedom and relief of a south-countryman released from long silence. A stranger to the company—mostly artists and sculptors, lost on arrival by the friend who had brought him to the ball, he had been cooling his heels for a couple of hours ; his fair, handsome face, tanned and bronzed, set off by a mass of curls, close and short like the sheepskin of his costume, attracting attention and whispered admiration of which he took little notice.

Roughly jostled by the dancers, the students quizzed and chaffed him about the bagpipe he carried all askew, and his queer mountain garb, warm and out of place on a hot summer night. A brazen-faced Japanese, with hair secured in a knot by steel knives, hummed as she stared at him : “ *Ah ! he is handsome, he is handsome, the Postillion—*” whilst a Spanish bride in white silk lace, passing on the arm of an Apache chief, thrust her bouquet of white jasmine under his nose.

He understood nothing of these advances, and feeling he was making himself ridiculous, sought refuge in the cool shade of the conservatory, on a divan placed under the greenery. He was soon joined by the woman who sat down beside him.

Young? Pretty? He could scarcely say. A blue woollen garment displayed two well-rounded arms, naked to the shoulder, and hid little of the outline of the supple figure beneath; her small hands smothered with rings, large grey eyes, wide open and looking all the larger because of the strangely wrought iron ornaments falling over her forehead, completed a harmonious whole. .

An actress, no doubt; many such came to Déchelette's. This thought did not put him at ease; as a class they filled him with terror. She spoke very low, head on hand and elbow on knee, her voice demurely soft, but sounding a little tired.

"Really from the South? Such fair hair, too! That's odd." . .

Then she wanted to know how long he had been in Paris, if the examination for the consulship he was going in for was very difficult, if he knew many people, and how it was he found himself at Déchelette's ball in the Rue de Rome, so far from the Latin quarter.

She started when he told her the name of the student who had brought him to the ball—"La Gournerie—a relation of the author—no doubt she knew him"—and her

face clouded ; but he did not notice it, for at his age eyes sparkle and see nothing. La Gournerie had told him his cousin would be there, and had promised to introduce him.

“ I like his poetry very much—I should be so glad to know him.”

With a pretty shrug of the shoulders, she smiled pityingly at his candour, at the same time holding aside with her hand the light leaves of a bamboo, and looking to the ballroom to see if she could not point out to him the great man.

At that moment the scene glittered and sparkled like a vision of fairyland. The studio, or hall rather, for little work was ever done there, extended to the full height of the building, and thus made one vast apartment of it. On the light, airy and summer-like hangings, the blinds of fine straw or gauze, the lacquered screens, the multi-coloured glass, on the bank of yellow roses which decked the hearth of the lofty Renaissance fireplace, shone the varied and weird light of innumerable Chinese, Persian, Moorish and Japanese lanterns ; some in open iron-work like the door of a mosque ; others in coloured paper, resembling fruit ; while some, opening like a fan, took the form of flowers,

ibises and serpents. Suddenly flashing gleams of bluish electric light obscured these thousands of lanterns, and cast a moonlight pallor on faces and bare shoulders, and on the whole phantasmagoria of dresses, feathers, spangles and ribbons: or, on the broad balustraded Dutch staircase leading to the corridors of the first storey, that rose no higher than the necks of the double-basses and the frantically waving baton of the leader of the orchestra.

The young man saw all this from his seat through a network of green branches and flowering creepers; which, blending with the scene, encircled it, and by an optical illusion threw, amid the wave-like motion of the dance, a garland of wistaria on the silver train of a princess's robe, or gave the pretty face of a pompadour shepherdess a dracæna leaf as head-dress. And now his interest was doubled in the pleasure of hearing from his Egyptian friend the names, all-famous and well-known concealed under these varied and whimsical costumes.

The whipper-in, with a short whip as a shoulder belt, was Jadin; whilst a little further on, that village priest in a shabby cassock was old Isabey, who had, with the

aid of a pack of cards in his buckled shoes, added to his inches. Old Corot was smiling from beneath the enormous peak of a pensioner's cap. She also pointed out Thomas Couture as a bulldog, Jundt as a convict warder, Cham as a bird of the tropics.

Some of the costumes were historical and serious ; a plumed Marat, a Prince Eugene, a Charles the First. These, worn by the younger men, marked well the difference between the two generations of artists ; the latter serious, cold, with faces wrinkled and aged by money cares, like those of speculators in the money market ; the others like frolicsome boys full of mischief and animal spirits.

In spite of his fifty-five years and the honours of the Institute, the sculptor Caoudal, as a mountebank hussar, his bare arms revealing Herculean biceps, and a painter's palette as a sabretache dangling about his long legs, was wriggling with de Potter the musician for a partner, through a figure that recalled the days of the Grande-Chaumiere. The latter, got up as a muezzin out for a holiday, his turban awry, and imitating the stomach dance, was bawling at the top of his shrill voice, " La Allah, il Allah."

A crowd of dancers, resting awhile, had

gathered round these merry-making celebrities, Déchelette, the master of the house, among the foremost. With small eyes, a Kalmuck nose, a grizzly beard and frowning under a tall Persian cap, he was happy enough in the gaiety of others ; and although he did not show it, feeling highly amused.

Déchelette, an engineer, a figure in artistic Paris ten or twelve years ago, was the best of good fellows ; very rich, with leanings towards art, and that frank manner, and contempt for public opinion which is fostered by travel and a bachelor life. He was now building a railway from Tauris to Teheran ; but, for two months each year he sought relief from the hot season, the fatigue of months, the nights under canvas and incessant hard riding across sand and swamp, at his mansion in the Rue de Rome which he had himself designed, and furnished like a summer palace. Here he gathered round him clever men and pretty women ; asking of civilisation during a few weeks all that it could give of pleasure and excitement.

“ Déchelette has arrived.” That was the talk of the studios whenever the immense canvas blind which, like the curtain of a theatre, covered the glazed façade of the

mansion, was drawn up. It was as much as to say that the festival had commenced, and that, for two months, music and merry-making, dancing and junketting, would banish the dull silence of the neighbourhood of the Place de l'Europe at a time when most people were in the country or at the seaside.

Personally, Déchelette took little or no part in the revelry of which his house night and day was the scene. A sturdy devotee of Venus and Bacchus, he took his pleasures in his own calm and measured way ; with a vague smile which suggested haschish, but all the same placidly cool and calculating. A very faithful friend, and open-handed without stint, he had, in spite of his indulgence and politeness, an Eastern contempt of women ; and not one who came to his house, attracted by his wealth or the round of pleasures found there, could boast she had been his mistress more than a day.

" A good fellow, all the same," added the Egyptian, who gave Gaussin these details. Then, suddenly interrupting herself :

" See, there is your poet ! "

" Where ? "

" Just in front of you—dressed as a village bridegroom."

“ Oh ! ” The young man was disappointed.

His poet ! That vulgar, perspiring, greasy man, so ungainly, and wearing the double-pointed collar and the flowered waistcoat peculiar to Jeannot ! The intense notes of despair of the “ Book of Love ” came to mind, the book he had never read without feeling his pulse beat faster ; and aloud, mechanically, he murmured :

“ To animate the proud marble of thy body,
O Sapho, I have given my veins’ last drop of blood—”

She turned abruptly to him, her savage ornaments jingling :

“ What are you saying ? ”

“ They are some of La Gournerie’s lines ” ; he was surprised she did not know them.

“ I don’t care for poetry,” she replied shortly ; and remained standing, with knitted brows, watching the dancers, and nervously crushing the beautiful bunch of lilac at her bosom. Then, with a strong effort, she said “ Good-evening,” and disappeared.

The pifferaro stood aghast. What was wrong ? What had he said ! He thought and thought, but could only conclude that he would do well to go home to bed. He picked up his bagpipe sadly, and re-entered

the ballroom, less troubled by the Egyptian's departure than by the crowd which impeded his way to the door.

A sense of his own inferiority amongst all this talent made him feel still more timid. Dancing was over, except that a couple here and there were footing it desperately to the last strains of a dying waltz ; among them, Caoudal, superb and massive, his head set high, was romping away with a little knitting-girl whom he held in his brawny arms, her hair streaming.

Through the large window at the end of the room, thrown wide open, came gusts of the grey morning air, rustling the palms, flattening the flames of the candles as if to put them out. a paper lantern caught light, some sconces were splintered, and all round the room the servants were placing little round tables, café-fashion. It was usual to seat four or five together at Déchelette's ; and the company began to sort themselves for supper.

All was now hubbub ; the " pit-ouit " of the street replied to the rattle-like " you-you-you-you " of the Eastern girls ; whilst whispers and undertones mingled with the voluptuous laughter of women who were being escorted to their places with a caress.

Gaussin was profiting by this tumult to reach the door, when his friend the student, streaming with perspiration, his eyes as big as saucers, a bottle under each arm, stopped him :

“ Where have you been all the time ? I’ve been looking everywhere for you. I’ve got a table and some women, little Bachellery of the Bouffes—the Japanese, you know. She sent me to find you. Come along, quick ! ” and he ran off.

The pifferaro was thirsty ; the atmosphere of the place tempted him, and so did the pretty face of the little actress who was making signs to him in the distance. But a sweet, grave voice murmured, close to his ear :

“ Do not go.” . .

His companion of a little while back was by his side, drawing him away ; and he followed her without hesitation. Why ? It was not that he thought her attractive ; he had scarcely looked at her ; and the other one at the table, who was calling him and arranging the steel knives in her hair, was much more to his taste. But he obeyed a will swayed by impetuous desire which was stronger than his own.

. “ Do not go ! ”

And suddenly they found themselves on the pavement of the Rue de Rome. Some cabs were waiting in the grey dawn. Street sweepers and men going to work looked up at this gaily-decorated festive house, and stared at the masquerading couple. A "Mardi-gras" at midsummer!

"To your rooms or mine?" she asked.

Unable to explain why, he thought it would be better to go to his own house, so he told the driver where to go. On the way, which was long, they spoke but little. Only she held one of his hands between her own, which he felt very small and icy cold; and but for this chilly nervous clasp, he would have thought she slept, leaning far back in the cab with the moving reflection of the blue blind on her face.

They stopped in front of a student's lodging-house in the Rue Jacob. Four flights to mount; it was high and steep.

"Would you like me to carry you?" he laughingly asked, but in a low tone, because of the sleeping house.

She looked him up and down, scornful and tender, out of an experience which took his measure and clearly said: "Poor little fellow."

Thereupon, with one effort, strong in his youth and country training, he raised her in his arms as he would have lifted a child, for he was stout and strapping in spite of his fair girlish skin, and mounted the first flight in one breath, happy in the weight which two soft, fresh, bare arms fastened to his neck.

The second flight was longer in the climbing, and he felt no pleasure in it. She had "let herself go" and felt lumpy. The iron of her pendants, which had at first tickled him caressingly, now cut cruelly, little by little into his flesh.

At the third flight he panted like a piano-porter; his breath failed him. She, in ecstasy, her eyes half closed, murmured:

"Oh! my dear, how nice it is! How happy I feel!"

And the last steps up which he, one by one, toiled, seemed to him—walls, bannisters and the little narrow windows—swimming in an interminable spiral. It was no longer a woman that he carried, but something heavy, horrible and stifling; an incubus which every moment he felt tempted to let go, and angrily dash from him even at the risk of brutally crushing it.

When he reached the corridor she opened her eyes and said :

“ Already ? ”

He thought to himself :

“ At last ! ”

But he could not have said it. He was deadly pale, his hands on his chest, which seemed about to burst.

That climbing of the stairs in the early grey dawn shadowed forth their future story.

CHAPTER II

HE kept her two days ; then she went away, leaving a memory of a soft skin and fine linen. Nothing more ; except her name, address and these words :

“ When you want me, send for me ; I shall always be ready.”

On the tiny, elegant, sweet-smelling card was inscribed :

FANNY LEGRAND,

6 RUE DE L'ARCADE.

He stuck it in the mirror, between an invitation to the last ball at the Foreign Office and the quaint illuminated programme of the Déchelette ball—his only society engagements that year. His remembrance of the woman lasted about as long as did the slight and delicate perfume about the fireplace ; and Gaussin, a conscientious worker, and mis-

trustful of the allurements of Paris, felt no desire to renew that evening's caress.

The government examination was fixed for November. He had thus only three months to prepare for it. After that would come three or four years in the offices of the Consular Service, when he would be sent somewhere—possibly far away. The thought of exile did not trouble him. It was a tradition in the old Avignon family of Gaussin d'Armandy that the eldest son should adopt "the career," with the example, the encouragement, and the moral support of those who had preceded him. For this countryman, therefore, Paris was but the first stage of a very long journey, a fact which forbade any entanglement or close friendship.

One evening a week or two after the Déchelette ball, as Gaussin, his lamp alight, his books arranged on the table was about to get to work there came a timid knock. The door being opened a woman appeared in a fashionable and bright costume. He recognised her only when she lifted her short veil.

"You see 'tis I ; I've come back."

Then noting the uneasy and awkward glances at the work in hand :

"Don't mind me. I shan't disturb you. I know what work is."

She took off her hat picked up a number of the *Tour du Monde*, installed herself in a chair, and budging never an inch, was apparently absorbed in reading ; but each time he raised his eyes, she was looking at him.

It really required all his self-control not to jump up and take her in his arms, for she was tempting enough, and charming enough with her little head and low forehead her short nose her voluptuous lip and the supple ripeness of her figure, set off by the fashionable Parisian robe which was less repellent to him than the cast-off garments of a daughter of Egypt.

Leaving early the next morning, she came back several times during the week ; always with the same pallor, the same cold, moist hands and the same voice trembling with emotion.

"I know well that I bore and weary you " she said to him. "I ought to have more pride. If you only knew. Every morning when I leave you I vow never to come again ; then in the evening, the mad folly of desire drives me back."

He looked at her amused, and in amaze-

ment ; this constancy of attachment softened his contempt for women. The girls he had known hitherto, picked up at cafés or skating rinks, sometimes young and pretty, always left him disgusted with their stupid laughter, cookmaid's hands, rude manners and coarse talk ; it made him open the window after them. In his innocence, he thought all women of easy virtue alike. He was, therefore, astonished to find in Fanny a true womanly sweetness. and reserve, with this advantage over the women of his class whom he had met at his mother's house in the country—she had the polish of art, and a knowledge of the world which gave interest and variety to her conversation.

Then she was a musician, accompanied herself on the piano and sang—her voice a well-trained contralto, though somewhat weak and unequal—some ballad by Chopin or Schumann, and the countryside songs of Berri, Burgundy, or Picardy, of which she had a full store.

Gaussin like the rest of his countrymen, was passionately fond of music, the art of hours of idleness and of the open air. In this way his working hours were lightened, and his leisure lulled in delicious repose.

And coming from Fanny it had special charms for him. He was surprised she was not on the stage, and so learnt that she had sung at the Lyric.

“ But not for long ; it bored me too much.”

There was no striving for effect, nothing of the actress about her ; not a shadow of vanity or falseness. Only a certain mystery as to her life apart from him, a mystery kept up even in the hours of passion, and which her lover did not care to go into, feeling neither jealous nor curious ; admitting her at the hour agreed without even looking at the clock ; not even a victim of expectation or the mighty throbbings of desire and impatience.

The summer was very fine that year, so, from time to time, they made excursions in search of those pretty nooks on the outskirts of Paris which she knew full well. They mingled with the noisy crowds leaving suburban stations, breakfasted at some tavern on the woodside or water's-edge, only avoiding certain too popular resorts. One day, when he proposed to go to Vaux-de-Cernay, she objected :

“ No, no, not there ; too many artists go there.”

This dislike of artists had been, he remembered the beginning of their love. Asking her the reason she said :

"They are such crazy, scatter-brained fellows ; they always exaggerate things. They have done me a lot of harm."

"For all that" he protested, "art is beautiful. There is nothing like it for embellishing and enlarging the view of life."

"See here, my dear," she replied, "to be beautiful is to be like you, simple and true—to be twenty years old, and to be in love."

Twenty ! She would never have been taken for more, to see her so bright, always at his call, full of smiles and finding pleasure in everything.

One night they arrived at Saint-Clair, in the Chevreuse valley, on the eve of a festival, and found there was no room to be had. It was late, and to reach the next village would mean a walk of nearly three miles through the woods. At last they were offered a vacant folding sack-bed at the end of a barn where some masons slept.

"Let us go there" she said, with a smile. "It will remind me of the days when I was poor."

She had known trouble then !

They crept in and groped their way between the already occupied beds in the great white-washed apartment, where a night light was smoking in a niche in the wall ; and all the close night through they lay clasped in each other's arms, smothering their kisses and laughter at the snoring and tired groans of their companions, whose soiled working clothes and clumsy boots lay cheek by jowl with the Parisian's silk gown and dainty shoes.

At dawn a cat-hole was opened at the bottom of a large doorway, a ray of light revealing the sack beds and well-beaten earthen floor whilst a hoarse voice shouted : " Hullo, there ! wake up ! " Then all was dark again, and soon commenced the slow and painful movements—yawnings, stretchings and loud coughing—the mournful human sounds of a waking dormitory. One by one, the Limousins, silent and grumpy, marched out, little dreaming that they had been sleeping close to a pretty girl.

When all had gone she rose, slipped on her dress in the dark, roughly twisted her hair, and said : " Lie still, I'm coming back." She returned in a few seconds, with an enormous armful of wild flowers drenched with dew.

“ Now, let us go to sleep,” she said, scattering the fresh, sweet-smelling morning blossoms on the bed, which revived the atmosphere around them. Never, he thought, had she looked so pretty as when she came into the barn in the early dawn with her light hair flying loose and her wild flowers. .

Another time they were breakfasting by the lake at Ville-d’Avray. An autumn morning enveloped in mist, the silent water and the tinted forest in front of them. Alone in the little garden of the restaurant they were kissing each other, butterfly-fashion, as they ate their white-bait. Suddenly, from a rustic arbour built in the branches of the plane-tree at the foot of which their table was placed a loud bantering voice exclaimed :

“ I say, when will you two have done kissing each other ? ”

And the leonine face and red moustache of Caoudal the sculptor peered at them through an opening in the latticework.

“ I have a good mind to come down and breakfast with you ; I feel as bored as an owl in an ivy-bush.”

Fanny said nothing ; she was visibly annoyed at the meeting. On the other hand Gaussin quickly assented, curious to see the

celebrated artist, and flattered to have him at his table.

Caoudal was very neat in a seemingly careless get-up ; still, everything was studied, from the white China crape tie to relieve a blotched and wrinkled complexion, down to the jacket tightly fitting a still slight figure with promineht muscles. Caoudal seemed older to him than at Déchelette's ball.

But what surprised and even embarrassed him a little was the tone of intimacy of the sculptor towards his mistress. He called her, familiarly, " Fanny."

" Do you know," said he to her, placing his cover on the table, " I have been a widower for fifteen days. Maria went off with Morateur. I did not trouble much at first. But this morning, on going to the studio, I felt fearfully lazy. Work was impossible. Then I gave it up and came down to breakfast in the country. Deuced nonsense when one's alone, but a little longer and I should have been crying in my plate."

Then, looking at the Provençal, whose downy beard and curly hair matched the colour of the sauterne in their glasses :

" Youth ! Isn't it glorious ? No fear of

letting that one go. And, what is better, it's catching. She looks as young as he."

"You horrid man!" she said, laughing; and her laugh rang with the seduction of blandishment that knows not age, of the youth of a woman who loves and wishes to be loved.

"Astonishing, astonishing," murmured Caoudal, watching her whilst eating, a suspicious curl of sadness and envy in the corners of his mouth.

"I say, Fanny, do you remember a breakfast here. Gad! it's long enough ago! There were Ezano, Dejoie, all of us; you fell in the lake. We put you in men's clothes, with the keeper's tunic. They became you splendidly."

"I don't recall it," she said coldly and without lying; these fickle creatures live but for their present hour of love. No memory of the "has been"; no fear of the "will be."

On the other hand, Caoudal, living in the past, reeled off, as he gulped glass after glass of sauterne, the exploits of boisterous youth; love and drinking, country rambles, balls at the opera, skylarking in the studio, battles fought and conquests made. But, turning to them with the light of the memories he had stirred up in his eyes, he saw they were paying

little attention, and were busy nibbling grapes from one another's lips.

"Aren't my yarns spicy enough? Well, well! I see I bore you. The deuce take it! It's stupid to be old." He got up and threw down his napkin.

"Langlois, charge the breakfast to me," he shouted towards the restaurant.

He walked away sadly, dragging his feet, as if worn out by incurable disease. For a long time the lovers watched his tall form as it bent in passing under the golden leaves.

"Poor Caoudal! he seems very shaky," murmured Fanny, in a tone of tender commiseration; and when Gaussin grew indignant that a trull like Maria, a mere model, could play with the feelings of a man like Caoudal, and prefer to the great artist—whom?—Morateur, a little obscure painter, without talent, with nothing but youth to his credit, she began to laugh:

"How innocent you are! How innocent you are! How simple!" and, with both hands, pulling his head down on her knees, she began to sniff and smell him all over—eyes, hair, everywhere—as she would a posy of flowers.

That evening for the first time, Jean

slept at his mistress's house. For three months she had tormented him to do so.

"But tell me why you won't!"

"I don't know; I don't wish to."

"When I tell you that I am free, that I am quite alone?"

But, tired with the country walk, she was able to entice him to the Rue de l'Arcade, which was quite close to the railway station. A door on the first floor of a plain but substantial and apparently respectable house was opened by an old sour-looking servant in a peasant's cap.

"It's Machaume. Good-day, Machaume," said Fanny, saluting her round the neck. "Here he is, you know, my sweetheart, my king! I've brought him. Quick! light up everywhere, make the house look bright."

Jean was left by himself in a tiny drawing-room, with low arched windows draped with the same common blue silk as covered the sofas and some lacquered furniture. On the walls three or four landscapes enlivened the drapery; all were inscribed, "To Fanny Legrand," or, "To my dear Fanny."

On the chimney-piece stood a half life-sized marble copy of Caoudal's "Sapho"; in bronze it is to be met with everywhere

—Gaussin had seen it in his father's study since he was quite a child. By the light of a single candle, placed near its base, he recognised the likeness of this work of art to his mistress, only more youthful and refined. How well he knew the lines of the profile, the swelling of the draped figure, the tapering roundness of the knee-clasping arms. As he feasted his eyes there came to him the memory of tenderer sensations.

Fanny found him lost in admiration before the statue, and said somewhat flippantly :

"There's something of me in it, is there not ? Caoudal's model was like me."

And immediately she led him into her room, where Machaume was sullenly laying the cloth for two on a little round table. All the candles were lighted, even those on the glass door of the wardrobe, and a nice wood fire, as genial as the first one of the season, was flaming behind the guard—the room of a woman dressing for a ball.

"I decided to have supper here," she said, laughing ; "we shall be sooner in bed."

Never had Jean seen a room more coquettishly furnished. The silk Louis XVI. hangings, and soft muslin draperies of his mother's and sisters' rooms were not the least

like this padded and quilted nest, in which the woodwork was hidden by delicate satin, and where the bed was only a sofa wider than the rest, spread out on white furs at the further end of the room.

After their wet tramp across country in the gathering twilight on rough and muddy roads, this softness of light, of warmth and of blue reflection in the bevelled mirror was very delicious. He was, however, debarred from enjoying all this comfort as became a true provincial, by the servant's bad humour, and the suspicious look she gave him, so that at last Fanny dismissed her abruptly :

"Leave us, Machaume, we will wait on ourselves." And as the peasant slammed the door on going out :

"Don't take any notice of her ; she will have it I love you too much. She says I'm throwing away my life. These country people are so greedy ! Her cooking, now, is better than she is ; tell me how you like this ragout of hare."

She served him, opened the champagne, forgot to help herself, watching him eating. The soft, white wool Algerian "gandoura," which she always wore in the house, displayed at every movement her arms up to the

shoulder. She reminded him thus of their first meeting at Déchelette's ; and, huddled together in the same armchair, eating out of the same plate, they spoke of that evening.

" Oh ! " said she, " as soon as I saw you come in, I felt attracted to you. I would have liked to take you, to carry you off at once, so that the others should not have you. What did you think when you saw me ? "

At first he had felt frightened of her ; then full of confidence, quite at his ease.

" By the way," he added, " I never asked you. Why were you so displeased with La Gournerie's lines ? "

Once more the same knitting of the brows as at the ball, then with a toss of the head :

" Folly ! do not speak any more about it ! " Then, winding her arms round him :

" I was a little fearful myself. I tried to get away, to collect myself, but I could not, I never will."

" Oh ! Never ! "

" You will see."

He passed it over with the incredulous smile of youth, apparently unconscious of the passionate, almost menacing tone in which she said : " You will see." Her womanly

"Swear you are not cross, that you will come again. Oh ! how I know you !"

He swore as she desired, but he could not be induced to get into bed again in spite of her repeated assurance that it was her own home, and that there was no one to say her "Nay" in her choice of life and conduct. At last she appeared content to see him go, and accompanied him to the door, with nothing of the fury in her now, but on the contrary, very humble, seeking to be forgiven.

A long and tender parting caress detained them in the ante-room.

"Well—when ?" she asked, her eyes looking straight into his. He was about to reply, doubtless a lie, for he was in a hurry to be gone, when a ring at the bell made him pause. Machaume left the kitchen, but Fanny made a sign to her :

"No, don't answer the door."

And they all three stood there motionless, without a word.

They heard a suppressed groan, then the rustle of a letter being slipped under the door, and footsteps descending slowly.

"When I told you I was free ! see there !" She handed her lover the letter, which she had just opened ; a poor love-letter, very humble,

very craving, scribbled in haste in pencil on a table at some café, in which the poor wretch begged her pardon for the folly of the morning, acknowledging that he had no claim upon her, except what she gave of her own free will and goodness, praying with clasped hands that she would not exile him always, promising to accept anything, resigned to all—only not to lose her—"My God!" not to lose her.

"Can you swallow it?" she said, with a wicked laugh; and this laugh completely turned against her the heart she wished to conquer. Jean thought her cruel. He did not know yet that a woman who loves has no thought but for her own love; all her charity kindness, pity, devotion, is showered on one and only one.

"You are very wrong to make fun of it. This letter is horribly affecting and heart-rending"; and then in a soft grave voice, taking her hands in his: "Tell me, why do you drive him away?"

"I don't want him. I don't love him."

"Yet he was your lover. He provided all the luxury in which you live and have always lived, and which is necessary to you."


"My dear," she said, in a sincere voice, "before I knew you, I thought it sufficient.

Now, it worries me. I feel it a shame ; my heart reproaches me. Oh ! I know, you would say that your connection is not serious—that you do not love me. That's my affair. Whether you will or not, I will force you to love me."

He made no reply, fixed a meeting for next day, and went away, giving Machaume a few louis—the contents of his student's purse—in payment of the ragout. As far as he was concerned, all was finished now. What right had he to trouble this woman's life, and what could he offer her in exchange for that which he caused her to lose ?

He wrote to her the same day, telling her this as gently and as sincerely as might be, suppressing, however, his own sense of something bad, something unwholesome in the passing caprice of their acquaintance ; a feeling borne in on him after his night of love on hearing the sobs of the deceived lover alternately with her laughter and wash-tub oaths.

Brought up in the heart of Provence, far away from Paris, this big overgrown boy was the portrait of his mother ; combining all her tender and sensitive nature with a certain share of his father's austere character. He



also had the example of his father's brother before him, as a safeguard against the allurements of a life of pleasure. His uncle's dissipation and folly had, indeed, half ruined their family, and imperilled the honour of their name.

Uncle Césaire! These two words, and the buried drama which they recalled, would suffice to impose on Jean far more terrible sacrifices than the brushing on one side of this intrigue, to which he had never given much importance. All the same, it was harder to break it off than he imagined.

Formally dismissed, she sought him again and again without losing heart at his refusals to see her, the closed door, or the strict instructions. "I have no self-respect," she wrote to him. She watched the hour of his meals at the restaurant, waited for him in front of the café where he read the papers. But, no tears, no scenes. If he was in company, she contented herself with following him, watching until such time as he would be free.

"Will you have me this evening? No? Another time then."

She went off with the gentle resignation of a pedlar who shoulders his pack, leaving

him in remorse at his harshness and humiliated at the lies he stammered whenever they met.

“The examination was near, the time was slipping away. Afterwards, later on, if she wished.”

As a matter of fact he thought, as soon as he had passed of taking a month's holiday in the South, and hoped that she would forget him during that time.

Alas, for his plan; when he had passed the examination he fell ill. A neglected chill, taken in a corridor at the Foreign Office, became serious. He knew no one in Paris, except some students from his own part of the country, who had kept aloof and dispersed on account of his engrossing entanglement. Besides, more than ordinary attendance was requisite, and from the first it was Fanny Legrand who took her place at his bedside, never leaving it for ten days. She was untiring in her duties, without fear or distaste. Clever as a nursing sister, with such gentle caresses that, at times, in his hours of fever, he was carried back to a serious illness in his childhood, calling her Aunt Divonne, and saying, “Thank you, Divonne,” when he felt Fanny's hands on his damp forehead.

"It's not Divonne, it's I ; I'm nursing you."

She saved him from mercenary attentions, ill-tended fires and slops from the porter's lodge ; and Jean could hardly credit the alert and ingenious skill of those hands brought up to indolence and voluptuousness. At night she slept for two hours on a sofa—a boarding-house sofa—about as soft as the plank bed at a police-station.

"But, my poor Fanny, do you never go home ?" he asked her one day. "I'm better now. You must go and reassure Machaume."

She began to laugh. There had been fine goings-on at home. Machaume was gone, and everything was sold—furniture, clothing, even the bedding. There was left only the dress on her back and a little underlinen, saved by her maid. If he sent her away now she would be on the streets.

CHAPTER · III

“ I THINK I’ve found something this time. In the Rue d’Amsterdam, opposite the railway station. Three rooms, and a large balcony. If you like we will go and look at it after you leave the office. It’s high up, five storeys, but you can carry me. It was so nice, do you recollect ? ” And highly amused at the thought of it, she snuggled up to him, seeking the old place—her place.

Life in furnished apartments became intolerable ; the disreputable habits, the slipshod women hanging about the staircase, the lath-and-plaster partitions behind which other couples were swarming, the mixing-up of keys, candlesticks, boots. She did not mind it, certainly ; with Jean, the roof, the cellar, the sewer even, all places were the same to roost in. But the finer instincts of the lover shrunk from certain matters to which, of himself, he would have been indifferent. These transient, one-night unions sickened him ; they seemed to degrade his home ; he regarded them with much the same kind

of sadness and disgust as he did the monkeys in the Jardin des Plantes, when parodying all the gestures and expressions of human love. The restaurant, too, bored him, and the necessity to go, twice daily, down the Boulevard Saint-Michael, to the great room crowded with students, art pupils, painters, architects, who, without being acquainted, had known him by sight for the last year since he had taken his meals there.

He blushed, on opening the door, to see Fanny the centre of observation; and he entered with the aggressive boldness of very young men when escorting a woman. He was afraid, too, he might meet one of his chiefs at the office, or someone from home. Then the question of economy arose.

"How expensive it is!" she said, every time she took up and went through the dinner bill. "If we had our own home I could do the catering for three days for this money."

"Well, what is to hinder us?" And then began the search for rooms.

It is the old snare—the instinct of what is most fitting; the taste and yearning for home, a result of early training, and a memory of the warmth of the old fireside. All are

hooked by it, the most decent and best-meaning.

The apartments in the Rue d'Amsterdam were taken at once, and found to be charming, despite one or two drawbacks—such as the rooms opening one into the other, and the outlook from the kitchen and sitting-room being on to a damp backyard, whence arose the fumes of slops and chlorine from a tavern hard by ; whilst the bedroom, on the steep and noisy street, was shaken day and night by the rattling of vans, drays, cabs, and omnibuses, and the whistles of arriving and departing trains, with all the hubbub of the western railway station, which reared its murky glass roofs in front of them. The advantage lay in the trains being at their door ; and Saint-Cloud, Ville d'Avray, Saint-Germain, and all the rural stations on the banks of the Seine, almost beneath their balcony. This was broad and commodious ; and the munificence of former tenants had covered it with a zinc awning, painted like striped ticking, dripping and desolate enough in the winter rains, but which, during the

summer, would come in splendidly for dining in the open air, as in a mountain chalet.

They spent a busy time in furnishing. Jean having written home about his plan of house-keeping, Aunt Divonne, who was a kind of house steward, sent him the necessary funds ; her letter also informed them they might soon look for the arrival of a wardrobe, a chest of drawers and a large cane armchair ; the " Windy Chamber " having been laid under contribution for his benefit.

This room, which he remembered as situated at the end of a passage at Castelet—always unused, the shutters closely barred, the door locked—was, from its aspect, subject to gusts of the " mistral " which shook it like a light-house chamber. There was stored the lumber which each generation cast aside to make room for fresh acquisitions.

If Divonne could only have known what unorthodox siestas would be taken in the arm-chair, or whose silk petticoats and frilled undergarments would fill the Empire chest of drawers ! But Gaussin's misgivings on this point were lost in the thousand and one little pleasures of making a home.

It was very jolly, after office hours, setting off arm-in-arm, in the dusk, on one of these

important journeys, going to some second-rate street to choose a dining-room suite—the sideboard, the tables and six chairs—or some curtains of flowered cretonne for the windows and the bed. He accepted everything blind-fold ; but Fanny had eyes for both ; tried the chairs, the leaves of the extending table, and proved herself an experienced buyer.

She knew shops where kitchen-ware for a small family could be had at factory prices, a complete set of four iron saucepans, a fifth enamelled for the morning chocolate—nothing of copper, it took too long to clean. Six metal spoons and forks, with a soup ladle, and two dozen plates of English ware, strong and pretty ; all this was got together and counted and packed like a doll's dinner-service. As for sheets, napkins, toilet and table linen, she knew an agent for a large Roubaix house, to whom one could pay so much per month. She was always on the lookout in the shop windows, in search of bargains at sales—the jetsam and flotsam which Paris is continually throwing up in the foam of her shores—and thus discovered in the Boulevard de Clichy the chance of a splendid bedstead, almost new, and large enough to sleep the Ogre's Seven Girls in a row.

He, too, on returning from the office, tried his hand at buying ; but he understood little about it, being unable to say " No," and never going away empty-handed. Entering a second-hand dealer's one day, to buy a cruet-stand which she had told him of, he found the article already sold, and so he brought home instead a drawing-room pendant lustre; useless enough since they had no drawing-room.

" We will put it in the verandah," said Fanny, to console him. .

And the fun of taking measurements, the discussion as to the position of the furniture, and the shouts, the mad laughs, the arms raised to the ceiling in dismay when, in spite of all precautions, and complete lists of absolute necessities, it was found something was always forgotten. .

Consider ! the sugar-grater. Just imagine anyone starting housekeeping without a sugar-grater !

Then when everything had been bought and put in order, the curtains hung, a wick in the new lamp, what a glorious evening they had when they moved in, minutely examining the three rooms before going to bed, and how she laughed whilst she showed him a light when bolting the door.

“ Another push—another, make everything fast. Let’s be really and truly at home.”

Then came a new and delicious life. On leaving his work he hastened back, anxious to get home to put on his slippers and sit at rest by his own fireside. Coming through the black, slushy streets he pictured to himself their warm, lighted room, made more attractive by the country furniture which Fanny had foretold would be rubbish, but which turned out to be very old and handsome ; the wardrobe especially, a gem in the Louis XVI. style, with painted panels representing Provençal fetes, shepherds in flowered jackets, and dances to the flute and tambourine. The sight of these out-of-date antiquities, familiar to his childish eyes, recalled his father’s roof, and consecrated his new home, the comfort of which he is now enjoying.

Fanny opened the door as soon as he rang the bell. She was always carefully, even coquettishly dressed ; “ all there,” as she said. Her black woollen-stuff dress, very plainly but fashionably made—the simplicity of a woman who knows how to dress well—her sleeves turned up and protected by a large white apron ; for she did the cooking herself,

and engaged a charwoman for such rough work as chaps the hands or spoils their shape.

She was very clever at cooking too, knowing many recipes, dishes peculiar to the North or the South, as varied as her store of popular songs, which dinner over, and the white apron hung up behind the closed kitchen door, she chanted in her languishing and passionate contralto.

Below was the roar of the street as the traffic rolled along. The cold rain rattled on the zinc verandah ; and Gaussin, his feet on the fender, stretched out in his easy-chair, watched the window-panes of the station opposite, and the clerks who, bending over their work, were writing by the white light of the great reflectors.

He was happy, he let himself be lulled. In love ? No ; but appreciating the love with which he was enveloped, grateful for this unflagging tenderness. How was it he could so long have deprived himself of this happiness, in the fear—which he laughed at now—of captivation, of an obstacle of some sort. Was not his life more decent now than when he roamed from one woman to another, at the risk of his health ?

He anticipated no danger for the future.

In three years' time, when he went away, the rupture would come of itself, without a shock. Fanny was forewarned ; they talked about it together, as about death, a far-off fatality, but inevitable. All he had on his mind was the great grief they would feel at home when they heard he was not living alone, and the anger of his stern and passionate father.

But how could they know ? Jean saw no one in Paris. His father, " the consul," as they called him at home, was engaged all the year round, superintending his large estate and sustaining a fierce struggle for his vines. His mother was utterly helpless, and could not take a step or make a move without assistance.

To Divonne was left the care of the house and his little twin sisters, Marthe and Marie, whose unlooked-for birth had for ever robbed his mother of all her strength. As for Uncle Césaire, Divonne's husband; he was a great child who was not allowed to travel alone.

Fanny knew all about the family now. When he received a letter from Castelet, at the foot of which the twins had added a few lines in their large, scrawley hand, she read it over his shoulder, in sympathy with him.

Of her own feelings he knew nothing, and never inquired. He was full of the beautiful, unconscious egoism of youth, knowing neither jealousy nor care. Full of his own life, he let it overflow, thought aloud, abandoned himself; whilst she remained silent.

Thus the days and the weeks rolled by in quiet happiness, once only troubled by a circumstance which deeply moved them, but in different ways. She thought herself likely to become a mother, and told him of it with such joy that he could not but share it. But his heart misgave him. A child at his age! What should he do with it? Should he recognise it? And what a tie between this woman and him! What a source of complication in the future!

In an instant he became aware of the chain about him, heavy, cold and riveted. At night he was wakeful as she was, and side by side in their big bed they dreamt, with eyes open, a thousand miles one from the other.

Fortunately, it was a false alarm and was not renewed, so they resumed their peaceful and delightfully secluded life. When the winter was past, and the bright days came back once more, their room, larger by the balcony and awning, became more attractive

still. In the evening they dined there beneath the green-tinted sky, to the twittering of the swallows darting here and there.

The warm air rose in whiffs from the street, together with many sounds from the adjoining houses ; but the slightest breath of wind was enough for them, and for hours they heard and saw nothing, their knees entwined, conscious of nothing else." Jean called to mind similar nights on the banks of the Rhone ; dreamt of far-away consulates in the tropics, and of departing vessels, on the decks of which would blow the same long-drawn breaths of wind as now fluttered the curtain of their tent. And when the words trembled on her lips : " Do you love me ? " he always returned from far-off to answer : " Oh, yes, I love you ! " See what it is to get hold of them so young ; they have too many things running in their heads.

Another couple were spooning on the same balcony, separated from them by some iron-work garlanded with twining flowers—Monsieur and Madame Hettéma, very fat, married people, whose kisses sounded like a box on the ears. Marvellously similar as regards age, taste and lumpy appearance, it was touching to hear those lovers on the shady

side of youth, chant softly in unison some old sentimental romance whilst leaning over the rails :

“ But I hear her sighing in the shadow,
Sweet is the dream, oh ! let me sleep again ! ”

They interested Fanny, and she would have been glad to know them. Sometimes even, she and her neighbour exchanged the smile of loving and happy women over the blackened hand-rail ; but the men, as is usually the case, held aloof, and did not speak.

One afternoon, Jean was returning from the Quai d'Orsay when someone at the corner of the Rue Royale called him by name. It was a lovely day, and Paris was basking in the hot glare at this corner of the boulevard which, on a fine evening, at the fashionable hour in the Bois, has no equal in the world.

“ Sit down there, beautiful youth, and have something to drink ; it does my eyes good to look on you ! ”

Two great arms, stretched out from under the awning of a café, overflowing with its three rows of tables on to the pavement, had laid hold of him. He raised no objection, flattered to hear curious whispers of Caoudal's name from the crowd of country-people,

foreigners, striped jackets and round hats around him.

The sculptor was sitting at one of the tables, the glass of absinthe before him harmonising well with his military figure and the rosette, that of an officer of the Legion of Honour, which he was wearing.

Next to him was Déchelette, the engineer, who had arrived the day before. He was always the same, sunburnt and yellow, his high cheek-bones throwing up his kindly little eyes, and his greedy nostril sniffing Paris. As soon as the young man was seated, Caoudal, pointing to him with a comical transport, exclaimed :

"Isn't he a handsome dog? To think that I was once his age, and had curls like that. Oh! Youth, Youth!"

"Always the same tune?" said Déchelette, smiling at his friend's crotchet.

"My dear fellow, don't laugh. All that I have, that I am, medals, crosses and Institute, the whole bag of tricks, I would give for that hair and bronzed complexion."

Then turning to Gaussin, in his abrupt way :

"And Sapho, what have you done with her? We never see her now."

Jean opened his eyes, not catching his meaning.

"You are then no longer with her?"

And seeing his perplexity Caoudal added impatiently :

"Sapho, you know—Fanny Legrand, Ville d'Avray!"

"Oh! that was finished long ago."

Why did he tell this lie? From a kind of shame, of uneasiness at this name of Sapho given to his mistress; a distaste for talking about her with other men? Perhaps, too, a desire to learn something about her that he would not otherwise have heard

"What! Sapho! Is she still on the war-path?" asked Déchelette carelessly, full of the intoxication of again seeing the steps of the Madeleine, the flower market, and the long vista of the boulevards set in two rows of green foliage.

"Don't you remember her when at your place last year? She looked superb in her Egyptian peasant's costume. And one morning that autumn, when I found her breakfasting at Langlois's with this pretty boy, you would have thought she was barely half-way through her honeymoon."

"How old is she really? From the time one has known her——"

Caoudal raised his head to think :

"How old? What age? Let me see, seventeen in '53, when she sat to me for my statue; we are now in '73. Count for yourself."

Suddenly his eyes sparkled :

"Ah! if you could only have seen her twenty years ago—tall, slender, with arched lip, fine forehead. What arms! Shoulders still a trifle thin—but that suited the burning ardour of Sapho. And as a woman, a mistress! What enjoyment in that womanhood, what sparks from that flint; a keyboard where not a note was missing—the be-all and end-all of a poet's inspiration! The whole lyre! as La Gournerie used to say."

Jean, very pale, asked :

"Was he her lover too?"

"La Gournerie? I should say so; he made me suffer enough. Four years we lived together as husband and wife; four years during which I cherished her, sparing nothing to satisfy every whim—singing-masters, music-masters, riding-masters—God only knows what more. And when I had well-polished her, put her in trim, clear-cut as a precious stone, and far removed from the

gutter out of which I lifted her one night, in front of the Bal Ragache, that infernal puddle-poet enticed her from the hospitable table at which he dined every Sunday!"

He was breathing hard, as if to drive away this old love grudge which still vibrated in his voice; then more calmly:

"After all, the viper profited nothing. For three years their life together was like hell. With all his cajolery he was mean, vicious, mad. The way they combed one another down was a sight for the gods; whenever you went to see them, you found them, she with a bandage over her eye, he with his face scratched and clawed. But the fun began when he wanted to leave her. She was as difficult to get quit of as a ringworm, followed him, battered his door, waited for him stretched on his mat. One night in mid-winter, she waited five hours for him outside Farcy's, where all the boys had gone. Oh, the pity of it! But the elegiac poet remained obdurate to the day, when to rid himself of her, he sought police protection. A nice gentleman that! As a wind-up and thankoffering to this beautiful girl, who had given him the best of her youth and person, and her intelligence, he hurled at her head a volume of

spiteful, drivelling verses, curses, lamentations, 'The Book of Love,' his best work."

Gaussin listened, his back bent and motionless, sipping through a long straw the iced drink before him. They must surely have given him some poison that froze his heart and stomach.

He shivered in spite of the glorious weather ; he saw a pale vision of passing shadows, a water-cart standing in front of the Madeleine, crossing and recrossing of carriages rolling over the soft road, as silent as if upon a padded way. There was no sound in Paris, except what was being said at this table. Now Déchelette spoke and poured out the poison :

"What a terrible thing these ruptures are !" and his quiet, scornful voice became gentle and full of infinite pity. "Two persons live together for years ; they sleep together, and mingle their dreams. They tell one another everything ; they share all in common. Their habits of life, and manner of speech, are the same ; they even grow like one another. They are bound together hand and foot, as intimate as the shirt on one's back ! Then suddenly they separate, are wrenched apart. How can they ! Where do they get

the courage ? I couldn't do it. Yes, deceived, insulted, besmeared with ridicule and filth, if the woman wept and said to me 'Stay,' I should not go. And that is why, in such circumstances, a single night suffices me. 'No morrow !' as they said in old France ; or else, marriage. 'It is decisive and fitter.'"

"No morrow, no morrow ; you may talk, but some women are not so easily dealt with. Sapho, for instance."

"I gave her not a minute's grace," said Déchelette, with a placid smile which the poor lover thought hideous.

"Then that was because you were not her style ; otherwise she is a girl who, when she loves, is devotion itself. She has domestic tastes. But she has been unlucky that way. She fixes up with Dejoie, the novelist ; he dies. She is passed on to Ezano, and he marries. Then the handsome Flamant, the engraver, formerly a model, for she has always had a rage for talent and beauty, has his turn, and you know his terrible story."

"What was that ?" asked Gaussin, in a choking voice, as he began to sip at his straw again, and listened to a love-drama which, a few years ago, convulsed Paris.

"The engraver was poor, mad about this woman; and, from fear of being thrown over, he forged her some banknotes to keep her in luxury. Discovery quickly followed, and he and his mistress were arrested. He was let off with ten years' imprisonment; she had the six months at Saint-Lazare, her innocence having been proved."

And Caoudal reminded Déchelette, who was present at the trial, how pretty she looked in her little Saint-Lazare cap, putting a bold, bright face on things, and faithful to her lover to the last. And her reply to the stupid old judge, and the kiss she blew to Flamant over the cocked hats of the gendarmes, calling out to him in a voice which would have melted a stone.

" 'Keep up your spirits, my dear; bright days will come back again, we shall love one another once more.' All the same, it rather disgusted her with domesticity, poor girl.

"Launched into the gay world, she has since then taken lovers by the month, and the week, but never artists. She had a horror of them. I was an exception—the only one, I really believe, that she continued to see. From time to time she came and smoked a

cigarette in my studio. Then months passed without my hearing tell of her, until the day I found her at breakfast with this pretty boy, eating grapes from his lips. I said to myself, 'Sapho is caught once more.' "

Jean could stand it no longer. The poison he had absorbed was killing him. Freezing a little while since, his breast now felt on fire, the flames mounting to his head, which whirled round and seemed ready to split like a metal plate at a white heat. He crossed the road, staggering under the wheels of the vehicles. The drivers shouted to him. Who were the idiots bawling at ?

Passing along the Madeleine flower-market, he was tormented by the smell of heliotrope, his mistress's favourite perfume. He hastened to escape it, and furious, torn by emotion, he thought aloud :

" My mistress ! yes, a nice tröllöpp, Sapho, Sapho. To think that I have lived a year with a thing like that ! "

He repeated the name in his fury, remembering having seen it in scurrilous rags, among the nicknames of other notorious women in the grotesque Almanach-Gotha of fast life ; Sapho, Cora, Caro, Phyrne, Jeanne de Poitiers, Le Phoque.

And with the five letters of her foul name, the whole disgusting life of this woman passed before his eyes. Caoudal's studio, the debauchery with La Gournerie, the night-watches before the squalid lodgings or on the poet's doormat. Then the handsome engraver, the forgeries, the assizes, and the little prison-cap which became her so well, and the kiss thrown to her forger——

“Keep up your spirits, my dear.”

My dear! The same name, the same caress which she gave him. What shame! Ah! he would make a clean sweep of all this filth. And always the smell of the heliotrope which pursued him in a twilight of the same pale lilac as the tiny flower.

All at once he awoke to the fact that he was pacing the market as he would the deck of a vessel. He resumed his way, arrived at lightning-speed at the Rue d'Amsterdam, having fully made up his mind to drive this woman out of his house, and throw her out on the stairs without explanation, hurling after her the insult of her name. At the door he hesitated, reflected, then took a few steps. She would cry, sob and fill the house with her gutter words, as once before in the Rue de l'Arcade.

Write ? Yes, that was the thing—much better ; he could settle the matter with a few brutal words. He entered an English tavern, deserted and depressing beneath the gas now being lit. He sat down at a sticky table, near the sole customer, a girl with a death's-head, who was devouring smoked salmon without drinking. He called for a pint of ale, but did not touch it, and began a letter. But his head was too full of words ; they were hustling one another, all wanted to tumble out at once, and he could hardly get the thickened ink to trace them at all.

He tore up two or three attempts, was about to leave without writing, when in a low tone, close to him, a full and greedy mouth asked timidly :

“ You are not drinking ; may I ? ”

He nodded that she might. The girl threw herself on the measure and finished it in one long draught, which showed the distress of the unfortunate who had just enough in her pocket to appease hunger without being able to moisten her lips with a little beer. Pity came to him, softened him, caused him to understand the miseries of a woman's life ; and he set himself to judge more humanely, to reason with his unhappiness.

When all was said and done, she had not lied to him, and if he knew nothing of her life it was because he had never bothered himself about it. With what could he reproach her ? Her time at Saint-Lazare ? But she had been acquitted, almost carried in triumph when she was released. What then ? Those who had been before him ? But he knew of that fact. What reason had he to think harshly of her because the names of her lovers were well-known, and celebrated ; or because he might meet them, speak to them, or see their portraits in all the shop-windows ? Had she committed a crime in preferring such as these ?

And down in the depths of his soul he felt a shameful, an unspeakable pride ; at sharing her with those great artists ; in telling himself that they, too, had found her beautiful. At his age one is never sure, never certain of one's choice. One loves woman, loves Love ; but judgment and experience are lacking ; and the young lover who shows you the portrait of his mistress, looks for reassurance in approbation. Sapho's figure seemed sublimated, surrounded by a halo, since he knew that she had been sung by La Gournerie, and

immortalised by Caoudal in marble and bronze.

But suddenly, seized with rage again, he left the seat on the distant boulevard where his meditation had led him, midst children's cries, and the gossip of workmen's wives in the dusty June night; and off he marched again, talking loudly and furiously. Pretty! the bronze of Sapho, the bronze of commerce dragged about everywhere, as common as the tunes on a street organ, like the word "Sapho" itself, which, with vitality enough to descend to us from remote ages, has had its pristine beauty debased by obscene legends, and has from the name of a goddess been changed into that of a disease. Good heavens! how disgusting it all was!

Thus he walked along, now calm, now furious—in a whirl of conflicting thoughts and feelings. The boulevard became dark and deserted. A sickly odour hung in the close atmosphere, and he recognised the gate of the large cemetery where he, with all the youth of Paris, had come the year before to the unveiling of a bust by Caoudal on the tomb of Dejoie, the novelist of the Latin quarter, the author of "Cenderinette." Dejoie! Caoudal! These two names had sounded

very strangely to him during the last two hours ! and the story of the student and the little home seemed to him very false and dismal now that he knew all the sad facts, and since he had learned from Déchelette the terrible name given to these marriages of the pavement.

These gloomy thoughts, intensified by the nearness of death, terrified him. He retraced his steps, rubbing against bloused figures who prowled about as silent as the wings of night ; or against draggled skirts at the entrance to dens whose rough window-panes served as a magic-lantern lens to shadow forth the embraces of passing couples. What time was it ? He felt as worn out as a recruit after drill, so numbed with grief that it crept, as it were, down to his legs, his only conscious feeling being that of stiffness. Oh, to go to bed and sleep ! Then, on waking, he would say to the woman, calmly and without anger :

“ I know what you are. The fault is not yours or mine, but we can no longer live together. Let us separate.”

And, to put himself out of her way, he would go home to his mother and sisters, and in the Rhone breezes and the free and

invigorating "mistral," he would shake off the degradation and horror of his bad dream.

She had gone to bed, tired of waiting, and slept in the full light of the lamp, an open book on the counterpane before her. He did not wake her in going in, and, standing close to the bed, he looked at her curiously, as at a woman he had never seen before, a stranger whom he had found there.

Beautiful, oh ! beautiful ; the arms, the neck, the shoulders as of fine amber, firm, without spot or blemish. But what weariness, what arowals could be seen upon the eyelids—reddened, perhaps by the novel she had been reading, perhaps by the anxiety of waiting—upon the features relaxed in sleep, now showing naught of the ardent desire of a woman craving to be loved. Her age, her excesses, her caprices, her love passages, and Saint-Lazare, the blows, the tears, the terrors—all were there laid bare to his eyes ; the deadly flowers of pleasure and sleeplessness ; the pout of disgust on the lower lip, used up, worn out, like the fountain where all the parish has drunk ; and the first signs of a bloated

loosening of the flesh for the wrinkles of old age.

This was the treason of sleep, enveloped in the silence of death—grand and sinister ; a field of battle by night, including the horrors that are seen, and those that are imagined in the ghostly shadows.

And all at once there came over the poor boy an overpowering, a suffocating desire to weep.

CHAPTER IV

DINNER was nearly finished, the window open, the swallows twittering in the twilight. Jean did not speak, but he intended to do so. It was always of the same cruel thing that was haunting him, and with which he had tortured Fanny ever since the meeting with Caoudal. She, seeing his eyes cast down, and his palpable affectation of indifference, read and anticipated him :

“ Listen, I know what you are going to say to me. “ Since all that is dead, I beg you to spare us ; I love no one but you, and there is no one else in the world——”

“ If it were as dead as you say, all past——” and he was watching her beautiful grey eyes change at every thought——“ you would not keep things which recall it—yes, there, in the wardrobe.”

The grey eyes were black now.

“ You know then ? ”

Must she then destroy the litter of love-letters, and portraits, the brilliant record

of her past life, saved from so many wrecks ?

“ At least you will believe in me afterwards ? ”

And, challenged by an incredulous smile, she ran to fetch the lacquered box : its chiselled ironwork amongst the delicate piles of underlinen had disquieted her lover very much during the last few days.

“ Burn ! tear ! do as you please ! ”

But he was in no hurry to turn the little key ; he first examined the cherry trees, the fruit in pink mother-of-pearl, and the flight of storks embossed on the lid, which, suddenly, he opened. All sorts and sizes of paper and handwriting ; some tinted with illuminated addresses ; old yellow notes broken at the creases ; pencil scrawls on leaves of notebooks ; visiting cards, all heaped, in no sort of order, like a drawer constantly rummaged and turned over. Into this, he, too, now plunged his trembling hands.

“ Pass them to me. I will burn them before your eyes.”

She spoke feverishly, on her knees in front of the grate, a lighted candle on the ground at her side.

“ Give them to me.”

But he said : " No, wait." And then, lower, as if ashamed : " I want to read."

" Why ? It will only cause you more pain."

She thought only of his suffering, nothing of the indelicacy of giving up thus the secrets of passion, the pillow confessions of all the men who had loved her ; and drawing nearer, still on her knees she read with him, the while watching him from the corners of her eyes.

Ten pages, signed La Gournerie, 1861, in a long effeminate hand." The poet, sent to Algiers to write the official lyrical account of the journey of the Emperor and Empress, gave his mistress a glowing description of the fetes.

Algiers was overflowing and swarming ; a true Bāgdad of the " Thousand and One Nights " ; all Africa was there, crowded in the town, beating against its gates with the hurricane force of a simoon. Caravans of negroes and camels laden with gum ; tents of dressed hides ; an odour of human musk from the monkey crowd encamped on the seashore, dancing round huge fires at night, and dispersing every morning on the arrival of the chiefs of the South, like Eastern kings in Oriental pomp ; discordant music, reed flutes, harsh little drums ; the " goud "

surrounding the tricoloured standard of the Prophet ; and, behind, led by negroes, the horses destined as presents for the "Emberour," clothed in silk, caparisoned in silver, shaking bells and embroideries at each step.

The poet's genius rendered all this life-like and vivid ; the words sparkled on the page like unmounted stones, as when jewellers value them on a piece of paper. Truly, the woman at whose feet these riches were thrown should have been proud. How she must have been loved, since, in spite of the attraction of the fetes, the poet thought only of her, and was dying to see her :

" Oh ! that night I was with you on the large sofa in the Rue de l'Arcade. You were naked ; you were mad ; you cried out with joy under my caresses ; when, suddenly, I started out of my sleep to find myself rolled in a rug on the terrace, beneath a starlit sky. The muezzin's cry floated from a neighbouring minaret like a bright and limpid stream of fire, voluptuous rather than imploring, and coming out of my dream, it was your voice I heard."

What was the evil impulse that urged him to go on reading in spite of the horrible jealousy which whitened his lips and clenched

his hands? Gently, coaxingly, Fanny tried to take the letter away; but he read it through; and after that, another, then another, dropping them as he read, with scorn and indifference, giving no thought to the flames which roared in the chimney, fed by the great poet's flowing and passionate effusions. Now and then, as the torrent of his unrestrained love boiled up in African heat, and some gross barrack-room obscenity polluted the lover's lyrics, such as would have surprised and scandalised the fine lady readers of the "Book of Love," with all its refined spirituality, as immaculate as the silver horn of the Jungfrau.

Heartachings! It was these passages, these blots on the page, which made Jean pause, little suspecting the nervous twitchings which each time convulsed his face. He had even the courage to sneer at this postscript to a glowing description of a fête of Aissaouas:

"I have been reading over my letter; really, some of it is not at all bad; put it on one side for me, it may come in useful."

"A gentleman who lets nothing go to waste," said he, as he passed on to another sheet in the same handwriting, on which, in the cold terms of a man of business, La

Gournerie demanded the return of a book of Arab songs and a pair of rice-straw slippers. It was the winding-up of their love affair. Ah ! he knew how to break it off ; he could take the bull by the horns.

And, without a break, Jean drained this cesspool of close and unwholesome emanations. The night drawing in, he placed the candle on the table, and was now skimming some short notes, splutteringly traced as with a stiletto, by great fingers, which in the savageness of desire or anger, tore and mauled the paper. The first days of the connection with Caoudal, assignations, suppers, country excursion, then quarrels, suppliant returns, laments, coarse and vulgar insults suddenly mingled with jokes, funny expressions, pitiful reproaches, all the weakness of the great artist when thrown over, laid bare.

The fire devoured it all, great red shooting tongues of flame smoking and shrivelling the flesh, the blood the tears of a man of genius. But what concern was it of Fanny's ! She was solely engrossed by the young lover whom she was watching, and whose ardent fever was scorching her through her clothes. He had just come across a pen-and-ink portrait, signed Garvarni, with this dedication :

"To my friend, Fanny Legrand, in a tavern at Dampiere one rainy day."

An intelligent and melancholy head, with hollow eyes, something bitter and worn-looking about it.

"Who's this?"

"Andre Dejoie. I kept it because of the signature."

"Keep it, you are welcome to it," he said, but so constrainedly and in such a miserable voice that she took the drawing and threw it, in pieces, on the fire, whilst he buried himself in the novelist's letters; a heart-rending story, dated from seaside winter resorts and inland watering-places, where the writer, sent for his health, grew desperate over his physical and moral afflictions, racking his brain to find there an idea far away from Paris, and mixing orders for medicine or prescriptions, anxieties about money or work, the despatch of proofs, of the renewal of bills, with always the same cry of longing for, and adoration of Sapho's beautiful body, which, by the doctor's orders, was forbidden fruit to him.

Furious and plain-spoken, Jean murmured:

"But what possessed them all to run after you like that?"

All he could read in these despairing letters

was a mental derangement in illustrious careers, such as are the envy of young men, and the dream of romantic women. Yes, what possessed them all? What had she given them to drink? He experienced the racking anguish of a man, who, bound hand and foot, sees the woman he loves outraged before his eyes; and yet he could not make up his mind to empty the box, with eyes shut, on to the fire.

The engraver came next. Wretched and unknown, his notoriety that of the *Police Gazette*, his place amongst these relics was solely due to the great love that she had borne him. These disgraceful letters, dated from Mazas prison, were as stupid, as awkward, and as sensational as those of a trooper to his rustic sweetheart. But running through the romantic effusions, one felt there was a respect for woman, a forgetfulness of self, which singled out this convict from the rest; as, when he asked Fanny's pardon for his crime in loving her too well; or, when writing from the Palais de Justice after sentence, he expressed his joy at knowing his mistress was acquitted and free. He complained of nothing; he had passed with her two years so full of happiness, so perfect, so profound,

that the memory of it sufficed to fill his life, to soften the horror of his fate, and he ended by asking her a favour :

" You know I have a child in the country, whose mother died long ago ; he lives with an old relation in a place so out-of-the-way that they will never know of my affair. I sent them all the money I had left, telling them that I was going far away on a long journey. I count on you, my darling Nini, to inquire from time to time after the poor little fellow, and to send me news of him."

As a proof of Fanny's interest, a letter of thanks followed, and another, quite recent, written barely six months before :

" Oh ! how kind you were to come. How pretty you looked, how good, beside my prison jacket, of which I was so much ashamed ! "

And Jean broke out savagely :

" You have continued to see him then ? "

" From time to time, out of charity."

" Even since we have been together ? "

" Yes, once, only once, in the visitor's room ; one only sees them there."

" Ah ! you are a kind soul."

The idea that, in spite of their connection, she visited this forger, exasperated him most

of all. He was too proud to own it ; but the last packet of letters, tied with blue ribbon over the fine, slanting writing, a feminine hand, let loose all his anger.

" I shall be changing my tunic after the chariot-race—come to my dressing-room——"

" No, no, don't read that ! "

She rushed at him, snatched the bundle from him, and threw it on the fire before he had time to understand, even when he saw her at his knees, red with the reflection of the flames and the shame of her confession.

" I was young ; it's Caoudal, that great fool—I did whatever he wished."

Then only did he understand, and became deadly pale.

" Ah ! yes—Sapho—the whole lyre." And spurning her with his foot as he would an unclean beast :

" Get away ! don't touch me ; you fill me with disgust."

A frightful clap, as of thunder quite near and prolonged, drowned her cry ; at the same time a bright glare lit up the room. Fire ! She sprang up in affright, mechanically seized the decanter from the table, and emptied it upon the mass of burning paper which had set light to the accumulation of last winter's

soot. Then followed the water-can, and jugs, but, seeing herself powerless, the flames darting into the middle of the room, she ran to the balcony crying :

“ Fire ! Fire ! ”

The Hettemas came first, followed by the door porter, and the police. Someone shouted :

“ Let down the register ! Get out on the roof ! Water, water ! No, a blanket ! ”

They stared dejectedly at the invaded and dirty room. When the alarm was over, and the fire extinguished, and when the grimy crowd under the street lamp had dispersed, and the neighbours were reassured, the two lovers, in the midst of this mess of water, damp soot and overturned furniture, felt disheartened and low-spirited, without the strength to renew their quarrel or to put things straight. Something sinister and evil had come into their lives ; and, that evening, forgetting their old aversion, they went and slept at a lodging-house.

Fanny's sacrifice turned out to little purpose.
Whole sentences from the destroyed and burnt

letters haunted the lover's mind, and caused the blood to rush to his face like certain passages in vile books. And, almost all these old lovers of his mistress were celebrated men ! The dead rose again ; the living—one encountered their names and portraits everywhere. People talked about them in his presence, and each time he felt a gnawing grief as from the violent rupture of a family tie.

The pain stimulated his perception and opened his eyes. He quickly began to discover in Fanny the influence of past associations, the turns of expression, the ideas and the habits which had left their mark upon her. A trick of thrusting out the thumb as if to fashion or to mould the object of which she was speaking, with a "you see this," came from the sculptor. Of Dejoie she had learnt to clip her words, as well as all his songs which were famous and popular in every corner of France ; while from La Gournerie she had imbibed a haughty and scornful intonation and severity of judgment on modern literature.

She had assimilated all this, incongruously superimposing one trait on another, as in the phenomenon of stratification, in the geological

layers of which can be read the earth's age and changes. Possibly she was not as clever as he had imagined ; but really it was not a question of intelligence. Had she no equal for stupidity, had she been vulgar and ten years older, she would still have held him by the force of her past, through the vile jealousy which was eating into him, but which allayed neither his disquiet nor their angry outbursts one against the other.

Dejoie's novels were no longer popular ; the whole edition could be found in the twopenny-halfpenny box at the secondhand bookstalls on the quay. Fancy that old fool Caoudal thinking of love at his age !

" Why, he has no teeth left ! I watched him at breakfast at the Ville d'Avray. He eats with his front teeth, like a goat. His hand, too, has lost its cunning. What a howler was his Nymph at the last Salon ! It wouldn't wash "—the expression was one she had picked up from the sculptor, and she had passed it on to him—" it wouldn't wash ! "

When he thus ran down one of his former rivals, Fanny, to please him, took up the same cue ; and there might be heard this callant, ignorant of art, of life, of everything, and a

shallow girl whose polish was but the veneer of the wit of famous artists, discussing them with an air of superiority, and condemning them as with magisterial authority.

But Gaussin's bitterest enemy was the engraver, Flamant. He knew nothing of him except that he was very handsome, was fair-complexioned like himself, and that he was called "duckie"; that Fanny went to see him on the quiet, and that when he reviled him as "the sentimental galley-slave" or "the handsome convict," she averted her face and said nothing. On this, he accused his mistress of retaining a sneaking fondness for the thief, until she was forced to explain gently but firmly :

"You know very well, Jean, that I no longer care for him, since I love you. I never go to see him; I answer none of his letters; but you shall never make me speak ill of the man who adored me to madness, even to crime."

On this plain speaking—her best quality—Jean desisted; all the same, he was torn by jealous hatred, accentuated by an uneasiness, which sometimes forced him home to the Rue d'Amsterdam in the middle of the day.

"What if she had gone to see him!" ;

He always found her there, domesticated, as indolent in their little home as an Oriental ; or else at the piano giving a singing lesson to their fat neighbour, Madame Hettema. Since the evening of the fire they had become acquainted with these good people, who, placid and plethoric, lived, doors and windows open, in a perpetual current of air.

The husband, a draughtsman at the Artillery Museum brought his work home ; and each evening—on Sunday all day long—he was to be seen bending over his trestle-table, sweating, puffing, in his shirt sleeves, waving his wristbands to make the air circulate, with a beard up to his eyes. Near him, his fat wife in a short jacket was steaming away too, although she never did anything. To cool the blood they sang, from time to time, one of their favourite duets.

Intimacy was soon established between the two families. In the morning, about ten o'clock, Hettema's loud voice called outside the door :

" Are you ready, Gaussin ? " And their offices being near each other, they walked together

Very dull, very vulgar, a few degrees lower in the social scale than his young friend,

the draughtsman spoke but little, spluttering as if he had as much beard in his mouth as on his cheeks ; but one felt that he was a good fellow, and Jean's mental trouble had need of some such influence. He was especially glad, too, on account of his mistress, who would otherwise have been living in a solitude peopled with souvenirs and regrets more dangerous, perhaps, than the ties which she had voluntarily renounced ; and who found in Madame Hetteima, who was unceasingly pre-occupied about her husband, or the savoury surprise she was preparing for his dinner, or the new song she would sing him during dessert, a decent and healthy diversion.

However, when the friendship involved the giving and receiving of invitations, he had a doubt. These people must believe them to be married ; his conscience kicked at the deceit, and he charged Fanny to tell her neighbour, to avoid any misunderstanding. This amused her very much. Poor child ! No one but himself had such simple ideas.

“ But they have never thought for one moment we were married. They care not a rap about it ! If you only knew where he picked up his wife ! Bad as I am, I am a saint compared with her. He only married her

to have her all to himself, and you see the past does not trouble him much."

He could not get over this. This worthy body, with her bright eyes, and a childish smile on her fat face, with her drawling provincialisms, and for whom novels were never sufficiently sentimental, nor words too select, once a woman of pleasure! And he, the husband, so calm, so sure of his conjugal happiness! He looked at him walking at his side, his pipe between his lips, with little sighs of contentment, whilst he himself was always brooding, or devoured with impotent rage.

"You will get over it, my dear," said Fanny to him softly, at those times when one says everything; and she soothed him, tender and charming as on the first day, but with a certain freedom of manner which Jean could not define.

It was the self-abandonment; the way she expressed herself; the consciousness of her power; the strange and unsolicited con-

fidences concerning her past life, with its almost forgotten debaucheries, and all but unmentionable follies. She no longer abstained from smoking, but was ever rolling in her fingers, and leaving about on all the furniture, the eternal cigarette with which a woman of the town beguiles her leisure. And in their discussions concerning the baseness of men and the insincerity of women she expressed the most cynical views of life. Even the expression of her eyes, dulled with latent moisture, was changed ; and there now flashed forth the lascivious smile.

The intimacy of their passion was likewise transformed. At first reserved, the first illusions of her lover's youth respected, the woman having now seen the effect on the boy of her rudely discovered past, and the unwholesome excitement with which she had fired his blood, no longer laid any restraint upon herself. She poured forth the lascivious caresses so long held back, the all-but-spoken but teeth clenched words of unrestrained passion. She showed herself off, and rioted to the full in amorous and practised queanry, in all the horrible glory of Sapho !

Modesty ! womanly reserve ! What was the good of it all ? Men are all alike, heart and soul for vice and corruption, this youth like the rest ! To let them gorge on what they love is still the best means to keep them. And all she knew—the infamies of pleasure with which she had been inoculated—Jean learnt in his turn, to pass it on to others. Thus the poison works and breeds, blasting body and soul like the torches which went from hand to hand through the stadium, of which the Latin poet speaks.

CHAPTER V

IN their bedroom, beside a dainty portrait of Fanny by James Tissot, a relic of the girl's palmy days, there was a southern landscape, all black and white, the work of a clumsy country photographer.

A rocky slope terraced with vineyards, shored up with banks of stone ; then above, sheltered from the north winds by rows of cypress, perched under a little grove of pines and sheeny-leaved myrtles, was a large, white house, half farm, half chateau. One noted the broad flight of steps, the Italian roof, the escutcheoned doors in the red walls of Provençal " mas," the perches for the peacocks, a fold for the flocks, and the black road from the open sheds with their glistening ploughs and harrows. The ruins of ancient ramparts and an enormous tower, pinked out on a cloudless sky, overlooked the whole pile, with a few roofs and the Roman belfry of Chateauneuf-des-Papes—such was the spot where the Gaussins d'Armandy had lived from time immemorial.

Castelet, farm and estate,* with its rich vineyards, famous as those of La Nerte and Hermitage, was handed down undivided from father to son, a home for all the children ; but always farmed by the younger son because, according to the family tradition, the eldest was destined for the consular service. Unfortunately, nature sometimes spoils plans so cut-and-dried, and, if ever there was a being incapable of managing an estate, or, indeed, of managing anything, without doubt his name was Césaire Gaussin, who, at twenty-four, had this heavy responsibility thrown upon his shoulders.

Well-known in all the village gambling dens and houses of ill-fame, Césaire, or rather "Le Fénat," the scapegrace, the "good-for-nothing," to give him his youthful nickname, was a striking case in point of that "sport," or contradiction of type which, now and again, crops up even in the most austere families—a kind of safety valve, as it were.

After a few years' mismanagement, foolish waste, and disastrous losses at "bouillotte" at the Avignon and Orange Clubs, the land was mortgaged, the reserve of wine exhausted, and the coming crops sold in advance. Then, one day, on the eve of the sheriff's seizure,

Le Fénat forged his brother's signature, drawing three bills payable at the Shanghai Consulate, persuading himself that he would be able to find the money to retire them before maturity. In due course, however, they were presented, his elder brother at the same time receiving a frantic letter confessing the ruin and the forgeries.

The consul came back to Chateauneuf post-haste, pulled through the crisis with the aid of his own savings and his wife's dowry ; and, recognising Le Fénat's incapacity, renounced his prospects of a brilliant "career," and became a simple vine-dresser.

He was a true Gaussin, conservative almost to a craze, of strong, calm feelings, like an inactive yet threatening volcano ; hard-working, too, and an expert wine-grower. Under his care Castelet flourished, with all the newly-acquired land up to the Rhone ; and, as human luck prefers its own company, little Jean made his bow in life under the myrtles of the family acres. During this time Le Fénat wandered about the house prostrate under the weight of his guilt, crushed by the scornful silence of his brother, whom he hardly dared look in the face. He only breathed freely in the fields, when hunting or fishing ; seeking to wear out

his sorrow with useless tasks, picking up snails, fashioning elaborate walking-sticks from myrtle or reeds, and breakfasting himself in the open off small birds which he skewered and roasted on a fire of olive stubs in the middle of the common. In the evening, returned to dinner at his brother's table, he spoke never a word, in spite of the compassionate smile of his sister-in-law, who pitied the poor fellow and furnished him with pocket-money unknown to her husband, who kept a tight hand over Le Fénat, less on account of the past folly than fear of which might happen again. As a matter of fact, no sooner had the one great slip been set straight, than the elder Gaussin's pride was put again to the test. .

Three times a week there came to Castelet, as needlewoman by the day, a pretty fisher-girl, Divonne Abrieu, born amongst the osier beds on the banks of the Rhone, a true water-lily, tall and supple. In her "catalane," its three pieces surrounding the small head, with strings thrown back, allowing one to admire her neck and the delicate flesh of the throat and shoulders, which, like, her face, was slightly sunburnt, she reminded one of some "done" of the ancient Courts of

Love held in olden days all around Château-neuf, at Courthezon, at Vacqueiras, in those old ruined donjons scattered about the hills.

Historical sentiment, however, went for little with Césaire in his love. He was a simple soul, destitute alike of imagination and reading. Small of stature himself, he liked big women, and was smitten from the first day. Le Fénat knew thoroughly well how to handle these village adventures : a quadrille at a dance on Sunday, a present of game, then at the first meeting in the open fields to strike home and take his will among the lavender and hay. But Divonne did not dance ; the game she took back to the kitchen ; and, strong as a white and supple riverside poplar, she sent the seducer rolling ten yards away. She afterwards kept him at a distance with the point of the scissors hanging from her girdle by a steel ring, and caused him to fall madly in love ; so much so, that he talked of marrying her, and confided in his sister-in-law. She had known Divonne from childhood, and liking her serious and gentle disposition, thought at the bottom of her heart that this union, ill-assorted as it was, might be the saving of Le Fénat ; but the consul's

pride revolted at the idea of a Gaussin d'Armandy marrying a peasant.

"If Césaire does marry her, I will never see him again." And he kept his word.

Césaire married her, left Castelét, and went to live on the banks of the Rhone with his wife's parents, on a small annuity which his brother allowed him, and which was brought him every month by his indulgent sister-in-law. Little Jean accompanied his mother on these visits, and was delighted with the Abrieus' hut, a sort of smoky rotunda, shaken by the north wind or the "mistral," and supported by a single beam upright like a mast. The open door set in a frame, so to speak, the little jetty where the nets were dried, and where scales bright as enamelled silver shone and danced. Below, two or three large boats pulled and creaked at the painters; while the great river, joyous, broad and shining, was wave-beaten by the wind against its islands tufted with pale green. Jean, still a child, thus first acquired his taste for distant travel, and for the sea of which he had never yet had sight.

Uncle Césaire's exile lasted two or three years, and would never have ended, perhaps, but for the family event: the birth of the

little twins, Marthe and Marie. The mother fell ill after her confinement, and Césaire and his wife were allowed to go and see her. The reconciliation of the brothers followed, unsought but instinctive, from the all-powerful ties of blood. The couple then went to live at Castelet, and as the poor mother became incurably anæmic—the added complication of rheumatic gout rendering her immovable—Divonne found her hands full, ~~what~~ with the management of the house, looking after the little ones, catering for the numerous household, and visiting Jean twice a week at the college at Avignon, to say nothing of the fact that the care of her patient required attention at all hours.

She was a careful and clear-headed woman, whose want of education was made up by shrewd common sense, and what scraps of learning still lingered in Le Fénat's cowed and disciplined brain. The consul trusted her with all the expenses of the house, now very burdensome with increased charges, and yearly diminishing income through phylloxera among the vines. All the plain had been attacked, but the home enclosure was still free, and the consul was anxious to save it by investigation and experiment.

It was Divonne Abrieu—she remained faithful to her peasant head-dress and working-woman's ring and carried herself modestly in her place as housekeeper and companion—who kept the household from embarrassment during those critical years, always providing the invalid with the same costly attentions. The little ones grew up at their mother's side, well-bred and ladylike, whilst Jean's allowance was regularly paid, first at college, then at Aix, where he went to study law, and finally at Paris, where he went to complete his education.

By what miracles of care and forethought she managed to do all this, no one knew, not even she herself. But every time Jean thought of Castelet, when he looked at the faint and faded photograph, the first face recalled, the first name mentioned was Divonne, the large-hearted peasant, who was, he felt, the warden of his home, keeping it together by the power of her will. For several days, however, since he knew what his mistress was, he avoided all mention in her presence of this revered name, as of that of his mother, and of all his people; even the photograph, astray and out of place on the wall above Sapho's bed, made him feel uneasy.

One day, on coming home to dinner, he was

surprised to see three covers laid instead of two, and still more so on finding Fanny playing cards with a little man whom he did not recognise at first, but who, on turning round, showed the bright, wild-goat's eyes, the large perspicuous nose, the tanned and rollicking face, and bald head and leaguer's beard of Uncle Césaire. At his nephew's exclamation, he replied, without throwing down his cards :

“ You see, I'm not at all dull. I'm playing bezique with my niece.”

His niece !

And Jean, who had been so careful to hide his entanglement from everyone ! This familiarity displeased him, as also did the remarks which Césaire threw out in an undertone whilst Fanny was busying herself with the dinner.

“ My congratulations, youngster ; what arms, what eyes, a morsel fit for a king ! ”

Matters became much worse at table when Le Fénat began to talk without reserve about affairs at Castelet, and what had brought him to Paris.

The pretext for the journey was to collect some money. He had some time ago lent his friend, Courbebaisse, eight thousand francs which he never expected to see again, when a

solicitor's letter had informed him of Courbe-baisse's death—the deuce!—and that they were ready to repay the eight thousand francs.

“But the true reason”—for the money could have been sent to him—“the true motive is your mother's health, my poor boy. For some time she has been getting very weak, and now occasionally her head fails her, she forgets everything, even the names of the dear little ones. The other evening, when your father had left her room, she asked Divonne who that good gentleman was who came to see her so often. No one is aware of this yet but your aunt, and she only told me of it to induce me to come and consult Bouchereau, who formerly attended her.”

“Does insanity run in your family?” asked Fanny, imitating La Gournerie's pedantic solemn style.

“Never,” said La Fénat, adding, with a malicious smile and contracted brow, that he had been a little touched in his youth; “but my madness was not displeasing to the ladies, and there was no need to shut me up.”

Jean looked at them, broken-hearted. Added to the grief caused by the sad news,

he felt oppressively uneasy at hearing this woman speak of his mother, and of the infirmities of her critical age, with the plain speech and experience of a matron, her elbows on the cloth, rolling a cigarette. And the other, blabbing and indiscreet, let his tongue run loose in discussing all the family private affairs.

"Yes! the vineyards were done for. Even the home enclosure would not last much longer; half the vines were diseased and the rest were only saved by a miracle, by dosing each bunch, each grape, like sick children, with costly drugs. The worst of it was that the consul kept on planting fresh vines for the worm to attack, instead of putting all this good land, now lying useless and covered with rotten and capers."

Happily, he, Césaire, had a few acres on the banks of the Rhone, which he was treating with immersion, a splendid discovery; possible, however only on low-lying lands. Already a good vintage encouraged him, a somewhat thin wine without much body, "frog's wine" the consul contemptuously called it; but Le Fénat was pig-headed too, and with Courbebaisse's eight thousand farncs he was going to buy La Piboulette.

"You know, my boy, the first island on

the Rhone, below Abrieu's—but between ourselves, no one at Castelet must know of this yet."

"Not even Divonne, uncle ?" asked Fanny, laughing.

At his wife's name Le Fénat's eyes moistened.

"Oh ! Divonne ! I never do anything without her. Besides, she believes in my idea, and would be very happy if her poor Césaire restored the fortunes of Castelet after having began their ruin."

Jean shuddered ; was he now going to make a confession, and relate the pitiable story of the forgeries ? But the Provençal, all tenderness for Divonne, began to talk of her, of the happiness she gave him. So pretty with it all, too, and so exquisitely made.

"See, niece ! you are a woman ; you ought to know something about it."

He gave her a photograph, which he took from his pocket-book, and which he always carried on him.

Fanny, judging from the filial tone of Jean's voice when speaking of his aunt, and from the motherly advice written in a peasant's shaky scrawl, had pictured Divonne

as a Seine-et-Oise villager. Her attention was, therefore, arrested by the pretty face, the regular features set off by the close white head-dress, and the shapely supple form of a woman of thirty-five.

"Yes, very pretty," she said, pursing her lips, and in a strange tone.

"And so splendidly put together!" said the uncle, who was partial to the figure of speech.

Then they went on the balcony. A fine rain was falling from a stray cloud on to the zinc of the verandah, still hot, after a sultry day, pattering merrily on the roofs, splashing the pavements, and refreshing the air. Paris was exhilarated under the shower, and the movement of the throng, the carriages and the murmuring noise intoxicated the countryman and stirred up in his empty head, as unsteady as a bell, the memories of his youth and of a three months' visit he had made to his friend Courbebaisse thirty years ago.

"What wenching, my children! What orgies!" And their visit to the Prado, one night during the Carnival in mid-Lent, Courbebaisse as Chicard, and his mistress, La Mornas, as a ballad-seller—the character

brought her luck, as she afterwards became a music-hall celebrity. He, the uncle, had a little darling called Pellicule in tow. And, full of merriment, his face all laughter, he hummed dance tunes and took his niece round the waist. At midnight, on leaving them for the Hotel Cujas, the only one he knew in Paris, he sung at the top of his voice on the stairs, throwing kisses to his niece who was lighting him down, and called out to Jean :

“ I say, take care of yourself ! ”

When he had gone, Fanny, who still seemed preoccupied, went quickly into her dressing-room, and through the open door, whilst Jean was going to bed, she began in an almost careless tone :

“ Your aunt is very pretty ; I don’t wonder that you used to talk so often about her. I suppose poor Fénat’s head sprouted — horns would grow well there ! ”

He was very indignant. Divonne ! a second mother to him ; who, when he was quite a child, cared for him, dressed him. She had nursed him in illness, saved him from death ; no, never had he been tempted to such base infamy.

“ Go on,” continued the woman’s jarring voice, some hair-pins between her teeth,

“you will never make me believe that with such eyes and such a fine figure as that fool was telling us about, his Divonne had no itch for you with your pretty, fair face and girlish skin. Believe me, we are all alike ; on the banks of the Rhone or anywhere else.”

She spoke from conviction, believing all her sex easy of approach, and vanquished by the first desire. He defended himself from the charge, but he felt troubled ; and, cudgelling his brain, asked himself whether the light touch of an innocent caress in passing had ever warned him of danger ; and, although he could find nothing, his affection was no longer without a stain, the nails had scratched the faultless cameo.

“Jean, look ! The head-dress of your country.”

On her beautiful hair, massed in long tresses, she had pinned a white neckerchief which represented pretty closely a “catalane,” the cap formed of three pieces of linen, worn by the girls of Chateauneuf ; and standing before him in her milk-white, gauzy night-dress, her eyes sparkling, she asked :

“Do I look like Divonne ?”

Oh, no, not at all ; only like herself ; the little cap recalled the other one, that

of Saint-Lazare, in which she looked so pretty, they said, as she threw a parting kiss to her convict in open court :

“ Keep up your spirits, my dear ; the happy days will come again.”

And the thought caused him so much pain, that as soon as his mistress was in bed, he put out the light at once, so as to hide her from his sight.

The uncle came back early the next morning, in boisterous spirits, flourishing his stick, calling out, “ Oh, oh ! naughty ! ” in the frisky, patronising tone of Courbebaisse long ago, when he came and found him in Pellicule’s arms. He appeared still more excited than on the previous night ; the Hotel Cujas, no doubt, and above all, the eight thousand francs folded away in his pocket-book, the money for La Piboulette. Well, yes, but surely he had a right to spend a few pounds of it to treat his niece to a breakfast in the country !

“ And Bouchereau ? ” his nephew reminded him ; he could not stay away from his office, two days running. So they decided to

breakfast in the Champs Elysees, and the two men were to go afterwards to the consultation.

That was not what Le Fénat had desired. He had pictured an arrival at Saint-Cloud in style, the carriage full of champagne ; but, all the same, the repast on the acacia-shaded terrace of the restaurant was charming, and within earshot of a morning rehearsal at the neighbouring music-hall. Césaire, very talkative, very polite, put on all his airs and graces to captivate the town lady. He mimicked the waiters, and complimented the cook on the miller sauce, while Fanny gave way to stupid and forced laughter at some broad private supper-room story which pained Gaussin, as also did the growing intimacy of uncle and niece before his eyes.

They might have been friends of twenty years' standing. Le Fénat became maudlin over the wine at dessert, talked of Castelet, of Divonne, and also of his little Jean ; he was pleased to see him with her, a steady woman who would not allow him to make a fool of himself. And with speech thick, his eyes bleared and running, and patting her arms the while, he gave her advice as to the young man's somewhat moody disposition, and how,

to manage him, as if she were a young bride.

He sobered up at Bouchereau's. 'Two hours' waiting on a first floor in the Place Vendome, in huge, lofty, cold rooms, among a silent and agonised crowd ; a hell of suffering which they traversed stage by stage, passing from room to room to the sanctum of the celebrated physician.

Bouchereau had a wonderful memory, and recalled Madame Gaussin perfectly, having been summoned to Castelet ten years before in consultation, at the commencement of her illness. He asked to be told the different symptoms, read again the old prescriptions, and quickly reassured the two men as to the mental disorder which had lately shown itself, and which he put down to the use of certain drugs. And whilst, sphinx-like, his bushy eyebrows knitted over the small but sharp and piercing eyes, the doctor wrote a long letter to his colleague at Avignon, the uncle and nephew listened, holding their breath, the scratching pen alone sufficing to drown all the muffled din of fashionable Paris, and they suddenly realised the might of the modern physician, the greatest priest, supreme belief, invincible superstition.

Césaire went out serious and chilled.

"I am going back to the hotel to pack my portmanteau; the air of Paris is not good for me—see, my boy? If I stop here I shall make a fool of myself. I shall catch the seven o'clock train. Excuse me to my niece, eh?"

Jean took good care not to detain him, fearful of his childishness and levity; and in the morning, on getting up, he was congratulating himself on knowing that his uncle was at home, safe, with Divonne, when he saw him coming in looking glum and his clothes in disorder.

"Good heavens! uncle, what's the matter?"

Sinking into an easy-chair, speechless, motionless, at first, but recovering himself by degrees, he confessed to meeting someone he knew in the Courbebaisse days—a heavy dinner, the eight thousand francs lost in a gambling hell the previous night. Not a fraction left. Nothing! How could he go home and tell this to Divonne? And how was he to buy La Piboulette? Suddenly, seized with a sort of frenzy, he put his hands to his eyes, stuffed his thumbs into his ears, and bellowing, sobbing like one possessed

the south countryman let loose a torrent of remorse in a general confession of his whole life. He was a shame, and no good to his friends ; such as he in a family ought to be killed like wolves. Without his brothers' generosity where would he have been ? Locked up with thieves and forgers !

" Uncle, uncle," said the unhappy Gaussin, trying to stop him.

But the uncle, wilfully blind and deaf, took a delight in this public confession of his crime, related even the smallest details, whilst Fanny looked at him with a pity mingled with admiration. At all events he was a thorough paced reprobate of the kind she liked ; and, feeling sorry for him, she was thinking how to help him. But which ? She had seen no one for a year ; Jean had no friends. Suddenly a name came to mind—Déchelette ! He should be in Paris now, and he was such a good fellow.

" But I hardly know him," said Jean.

" I will go myself."

" What ! You would ? "

" Why not ? "

Their eyes met, and they understood each other. Déchelette too, had been her lover ; a one-night lover whom she hardly remem-

bered. But he never forgot one of them ; they were all in-a row in his head, like the saints in the calendar.

“ If it displeases you——” she said, a little embarrassed. But Césaire, who, during this short debate, had left off howling, very anxiously looking at them with such a despairing supplication that Jean gave way and mutteringly consented.

What a long hour it seemed to the two distracted men, each torn by thoughts they could not tell, leaning over the balcony watching for her return.

“ It’s some distance, then, to this Déchelette’s ? ”

“ Not at all—Rue de Rome—a step or two,” replied Jean furiously ; he, too, was thinking Fanny a long time gone. He tried to calm himself with the engineer’s maxim in love, “ No morrow,” and the contemptuous manner in which he spoke of Sapho as a foundered member of the frail sisterhood, but his lover’s pride kicked at this, and he almost wished that Déchelette would still find her pretty and desirable. Oh ! How this crazy old fool had torn open all the old sores !

At length they saw Fanny’s cape turning

the corner of the street. She entered radiant.

"It's done. Here's the money!"

The eight thousand francs were spread out before him, and the uncle, weeping for joy, wanted to give a receipt, settle the interest and the date for repayment.

"There's no need to do so, uncle; I never mentioned your name. The money is lent to me; it is to me you owe it, and you can keep it as long as you please."

"Such services, my child," replied Césaire, full of gratitude, "are repaid by eternal friendship."

And in the station where Gaussin accompanied him, to make sure this time of his departure, he repeated, with tears in his eyes:

"What a woman! What a treasure! You must see to it you make her happy!"

Jean was very much put out about the matter, feeling that his chain, already heavy, was being riveted tighter and tighter, two things getting mixed up together that his

native delicacy had always kept separate and distinct ; his family and this entanglement. Césaire now told his mistress all about his work, his plantings, and gave her all the news of Castelet. Fanny began to criticise the consul's obstinacy in the matter of the vines, talked about his mother's health, and irritated Jean with her solicitude or misplaced advice. But, never a reference to the service she had rendered, nor to Le Fénat's old escapade, that stain on the house of Armandy, which the uncle had blurted out before her. Once only she made it a weapon for repartee under the following circumstances :

They were returning from the theatre, and were getting into a cab, in the rain, on a cab-rank on the boulevard. The cab, an old "growler" such as plys only after midnight, was a long time starting, the driver being asleep and the beast tossing its nose-bag. Whilst they were waiting under cover in the vehicle, an old cabman who was putting a new lash on his whip came up to the door, a bit of whip cord between his teeth, and said to Fanny, in a cracked voice stinking with wine :

" Good-evening ! How are things going ?.."

“Hullo ; is it you ? ”

She started a little, but quickly recovering herself, said in a low voice to her lover :

“My father ! ”

Her father ! this ruffian in a long, livery driving-coat, covered with mud, the metal buttons, torn off, and showing under the street lamps a bloated, drink-sodden face, in which Gaussin thought he saw a vulgarised likeness on a hideous scale to Fanny's regular and sensuous profile and her large voluptuous eyes ! Taking no notice of the man who accompanied his daughter, completely ignoring him, old Legrand told her the news of the family.

“The old woman's been at the Necker hospital for the last fortnight ; she's in a bad way. Go and see her one Thursday, it'll liven her up. As for me, fortunately, I've a sound carcase, always fit. Only, trade's not very good. If you wanted a good driver by the month, it would be just the thing for me. No ? So much the worse, then ; good-bye, till next time ! ”

They lightly touched one another's hand ; the cab moved off.

“Well, would you believe it ? ” murmured Fanny ; and all at once she began to spin a

long yarn about her family—a thing she had always avoided, “it was so ugly, so low,” but they knew one another better now; they had no need for concealment. She was born at the Moulin-aux-Anglais in the suburbs; this father of hers was an old dragoon, who drove a coach between Paris and Châtillon, and her mother an inn servant, helping in the bar. She never knew her mother, who died in childbirth; but her father’s employers, being good sort of people, made him own the little one and pay the nurse. He dared not refuse, for he was deeply in debt to them. When Fanny was four years old, he took her with him on the coach like a little dog, and perched up under the hood, she amused herself with spinning thus along the roads, looking at the light from the lanterns, running along on either side, watching the steaming and panting backs of the horses, and going to sleep in the dark, in the breeze, with the sound of the bells in her ears.

But old Legrand got tired of playing the father, little as it cost to feed and dress the brat. Then she stood in the way of his marriage with the widow of a market-gardener, on whose melon-frames and rows of cabbages along his route he had an eye. At that time

she firmly believed her father wanted to lose her ; that the drunkard's fixed idea was to rid himself of her at all hazards ; and if the widow herself, good old Machaume, had not taken the little girl under her protection——

“ You know her, by-the-bye—Machaume,” said Fanny.

“ What ! the servant I saw at your place——”

“ She was my stepmother. She had been so kind to me when I was little that I took her to get away from her scoundrel of a husband, who, after squandering all her money, beat her cruelly, and made her wait upon a trollop with whom he lived. Poor Machaume ! she knows what a handsome man costs. Well, when she left me, in spite of all my entreaties, she went back to him, and now she's in the hospital. What times he's having without her, the old blackguard ! how filthy he was ! what a ruffianly look ! he only cares for his whip—did you see how straight he held it ? . If he were shaking with drink, he would carry it in front of him like a taper, and lock it up in his room. It's the only decent thing about him. ‘ Good whip, good lash,’ that's his motto.”

She talked heedlessly about him, as of a stranger, without disgust or shame ; and Jean was appalled at hearing her. That father ! that mother ! by the side of the consul's stern face and Madame Gaussin's angelic smile ! And, suddenly she realised the meaning of her lover's silence, and his disgust with the pollution of the social muck-heap with which, through her, he came in contact.

"After all," said Fanny sententiously, "there is something shady in every family ; one can't be blamed for it. I've my father Legrand ; you've your Uncle Césaire."

CHAPTER VI

" My dear child, I am writing to you, still trembling with the anxiety we have all been in : the twins disappeared from Castelet for a whole day, one night and the morning of the next day !

" The little ones were missed on Sunday at breakfast-time. I had dressed them nicely for eight o'clock mass, to which they were going with the consul, and thought no more about them, as I was busy with your mother, who was more nervous than usual, as if sensing the misfortune hanging over us. You know she has always been like that since her illness, foreseeing what is about to happen ; and the less she is able to move the more her brain works.

" Luckily, your mother was in her bedroom ; but you can imagine us all in the dining-room waiting for the little ones. We shouted for them all over the farm, the shepherd blew the great horn with which he calls back the sheep. Then Césaire went one way, and I another—Rousseline, Tardive, all of us rushing about Castelet, and every time we met : ' Well ?'

'We have seen nothing.' At last we dared ask no more ; we looked in the wells, our hearts beating, and under the high windows of the loft. What a day ! And every moment I was fearing to be compelled to go up to your mother's room, to put on a bright face and explain the absence of the little ones by saying I had them sent to spend the Sunday at their aunt's at Villamuris ! She seemed to believe it ; but, later in the evening, whilst I was attending her, my eyes watching through the window the flickering lights in the plain and by the Rhone searching for the children, I heard her crying softly in bed ; and when I questioned her : *'I am crying at something you are hiding from me, but which, all the same, I have guessed——'* This she said in the childish voice which has come back to her from much suffering ; and without another word we both of us gave way to our grief.

"Well, my dear child, to cut a painful story short. On Monday morning our little ones were brought back to us by the workmen employed by your uncle on the island, who had found them on a heap of vine-shoots, pale from cold and hunger and a night on the water, in the open air. Here is what they told us in the simplicity of their little hearts. They had read the story of their patron saints, Marthe and Marie, and for

a long time past they had been troubled with the idea that they ought to do as they had done—start off in an open boat with neither sails nor oars, nor provisions of any sort, and spread the Gospel on the first shore to which God's Breath should waft them. So, on Sunday, after mass, they unloosed a fishing boat; and, kneeling at the bottom like the holy women, whilst the current carried them away, they gently stranded among the reeds of La Piboulette, in spite of the heavy swollen waters at this season, or the high winds, the 'revouluns.' Yes, it was God who took care of them and brought them back to us, the pretty creatures, having rumpled their Sunday frocks a little and spoilt the gold on their prayer-books. We had not the heart to scold them, and received them with hearty kisses and open arms; but we are all feeling ill from the fright.

"Your mother was most affected. Without anything having been said about this to her, she has felt, she says, death pass over Castelet; and ordinarily so quiet and cheerful, she is attacked by a melancholy which nothing can dispel, though your father, myself, and all of us surround her with our loving attentions. And I must tell you, my Jean, it is for you especially that she pines and yearns. She dare not own it to your father, who wishes you to be left alone at your

work ; but you did not come home after the examination as you promised. Give us a surprise at Christmas, so that our invalid may put on her old smile again. If you only knew how one regrets when they are gone that they did not devote more time to the old folks ! ”

Jean was standing at the window in the sluggish, filtering light of a foggy winter's day reading this letter, enjoying its rustic fragrance and the dear souvenirs of love and sunshine.

“ What is it ? ‘ Let me see ! ’ ”

The yellow light was coming through the drawn curtain, and Fanny, just awakened, but still drowsy with sleep, stretched out her hand mechanically towards the packet of Maryland tobacco in its usual place on the bedside table. He hesitated, knowing the jealousy which exasperated his mistress at the bare mention of Divonne's name ; but how hide the letter when she had recognised the shape and whence it came ?

At first the little girls' escapade touched her—she was resting on the pillow on a cloud of her brown hair, her arms and neck exposed. She read the letter through whilst rolling a cigarette ; but the last part roused her to fury, and tearing up and throwing the letter about the room :

"Holy women be hanged ! All inventions to entice you home ! She misses her handsome nephew, this——"

He tried to stop her, to prevent the filthy word which she yelled out, and many others with it. Never had she conducted herself so coarsely in his presence, in this flood of rampant rage, this open sewer letting loose its slime and stench—all the foul slang of the harlot and guttersnipe causing her neck to swell and her lip to hang.

It was easy to see what they wanted down there. Césaire had been talking, and the family had put their heads together to break off their connection, to get him back into the country again, using pretty Divonne as a bait.

"In the first place, be assured that, if you go, I will write to your cuckold—I will warn him.—Ah, but——"

As she spoke she rolled herself up spitefully on the bed, pale, her cheeks hollow, her features swollen, like a savage beast ready to spring.

And Gaussin recalled having seen her thus in the Rue de l'Arcade ; but this wild hatred was turned against him now, and he felt tempted to fall upon his mistress and beat her. In these loves of the flesh, where is

naught of esteem and respect for the loved one, brutality always comes to the surface in quarrels as in caresses. . He felt afraid of himself, so rushed away to the office ; and, as he walked along, he felt disgusted at this life of his own making. This would teach him to put himself in the power of women like this ! What insults ! what horrors ! His sisters, his mother, no one was spared. What ! not even the right to go and see his people ! What prison was he shut up in then ? And, all the history of his entanglement came back to him, he saw how the Egyptian's beautiful naked arms, twined round his neck the evening of the ball, had fastened there despotically and fiercely, separating him from his friends, from his family. Now, however, his resolution was taken. That very evening, at all costs, he would leave for Castelet.

Some business transacted, his leave from the office obtained, he went home early, expecting a terrible scene, ready for everything, even a rupture. But the tender greeting which Fanny at once gave him, her swollen eyes and her tear-stained cheeks, hardly left him the courage of his will.

" I am going this evening," he said stiffly.

" You are right, my dear ; go and see your

mother ; above all"—she wheedled up to him—"forget that I was naughty. I love you too much ; it's my folly."

All the rest of the day, packing his port-manteau, with coquettish solicitude, putting on all the sweetness of the old days, she kept up this penitent attitude, possibly in the hope of detaining him. But, yet she never once said to him, "Stay !" and at the last moment, all hope gone in view of the last preparations, she nestled and pressed up closely to her lover, as if trying to impregnate him for his journey and absence, with herself, with her adieu, her kiss, only murmuring the while :

"Tell me, Jean, you are not angry with me ?"

Oh ! the delight the next morning at waking up in the little room of his childhood, his heart still glowing with the affectionate embraces, and the joy of his coming ; at finding the same shaft of light which in the past on waking he always sought, there in the same place, on the mosquito curtain of his narrow bed ; at hearing the cries of the peacocks on their perches, the creaking well-pulley, and the quick pattering feet of the sheep ; and, when he had fastened the shutters back against the wall, at again seeing the lovely warm light flooding his room as through a

sluice-gate, and the wonderful horizon of terraced vineyards, of cypresses, olive trees, and glistening pine woods losing themselves in the distance beyond the Rhone under the deep and pure sky, without a trace of mist in spite of the early hour—a green sky, swept all night by the mistral which was still filling the immense valley with its strong and cheerful breath !

Jean contrasted this awakening with those elsewhere, under a sky as foul as his love, and he felt happy and free. He went downstairs. The sun-whitened house was still sleeping, all the shutters closed as if they were eyes ; and he was thankful to be alone—to collect himself—in this moral convalescence which he felt beginning within him.

He made a few turns on the terrace, took a steep path in the park, or what they called the park, a grove of pines and myrtles growing haphazard on the rough hillside of Castelet, intersected by uneven tracks, slippery with dry pine-needles. His dog, Miracle, very old and lame, had come out of his kennel and was following silently at his heels ; they had so often before taken this morning walk together !

At the entrance to the vineyards—the great cypresses enclosing them were nodding their

lofty heads—the dog hesitated ; he knew how trying the ground, thickly dressed with sand, a new remedy for the phylloxera which the consul was giving a trial, would be to his old paws ; not less so than the steep gradients of the terrace. The pleasure of following his master, nevertheless, decided him ; and at each obstacle there were painful efforts, timid whines, halts, and sprawlings like a crab on a rock. Jean took no notice of him, being fully occupied with the new Alicante vine-stock of which his father had told him much the day before. The stocks seemed to be doing well on the level and glistening sand. At last the poor man would be repaid for his dogged efforts ; Castelet might revive when La Nerte, Hermitage, and all the great vineyards of the south, had perished !

A little white cap popped out suddenly in front of him. It was Divonne, the first in the house to rise ; she had a pruning-knife in her hand, and something else which she threw away, while her cheeks, usually so pale, flushed scarlet :

“ It’s you, Jean ? You frightened me. I thought it was your father.” Then recovering herself, she kissed him.

“ Have you slept well ? ”

" Very well, aunt ; but why do you fear my father's coming ? "

" Why ? "

She picked up the vine-root which she had just torn up.

" The consul told you, did he not, that this time he was sure of success ? Well, look ! there's the beast."

Jean saw the small yellowish moss eating into the wood, the imperceptible mouldiness, that, spreading 'from one to another, has ruined whole provinces. This tiny atom, destructive and indestructible, was an irony of nature, on this splendid morning, under the life-giving sun.

" That is the beginning. In three months the whole home enclosure will be eaten up, and your father will begin anew, for his pride is at stake. It will be new plants, fresh remedies, until——"

A gesture of despair ended and emphasised the sentence.

" Really ! has it come to that ? "

" Oh ! you know the consul. He says nothing, gives me the house-keeping-money every month as usual ; but I can see he is worried. He goes off to Avignon, to Orange : it is to find money."

..

“ And Césaire ? His immersions ? ” asked the young man, in dismay.

Thank God ! all was going well there. They had fifty puncheons of ordinary wine the last vintage ; and this year the yield would be doubled. In view of this success the consul had made over to his brother all the vineyards in the plain, hitherto lying fallow, rows of dead posts like a country cemetery, and now they had all been under water three months.

And proud of the work of her husband, her Fénat's work, the Provençal pointed out to Jean from the rising ground on which they stood great ponds dammed with chalk, as at salt works.

“ In two years the vines will yield ; in two years La Piboulette also, and the island of Lamotte too, which your uncle bought without saying anything about it. Then we shall be rich, but we must keep going till then, and everyone must put the shoulder to the wheel and make a sacrifice.”

She put on such a good face in speaking of sacrifice, as though it were a matter of course, that Jean caught something of the impulse, and a thought flashing on his mind, he answered in the same cheerful spirit :

“ Sacrifices shall be made, Divonne.”

He wrote to Fanny the same day, telling her his parents were unable to continue his allowance, that his salary was all he would have to depend on, and that under these circumstances their living together was impossible. The break came earlier than he had thought, three or four years before the expected departure ;^d but he counted on his mistress accepting these grave reasons, sympathising with him in his trouble, and helping him in a painful course of duty.

Was it really a sacrifice ? Was it not, on the contrary, a relief to have done with a life which he thought hateful and unhealthy ; all the more so since he had returned to nature, to his family, to simple and pure affections ? His letter cost him neither pain nor effort. He foresaw a furious answer, full of threats and impetuous passion, but he counted for his defence on the true and sterling tenderness of the kind hearts around him, the example of his father, upright and proud amongst them all, on the frank smile of the “ little sainted women,” and also on the bold peaceful horizon, healthy with the mountain air, the lofty sky, the rapid and hurrying river ; for, in thinking of his passion, of all the base elements of which

it was comprised, he seemed to be recovering from a pestilent malarial fever.

Five or six days passed in silence. Morning and evening Jean went to the post and returned with empty hands, very troubled. What was she doing? What had she decided, and, in any case, why did she not reply? He thought of nothing else. And at night, when everyone at Castelet was asleep with the lullaby of the wind in the long corridors, they talked of it, Césaire and he, in his little room.

"She is capable of coming herself," said his uncle, whose uneasiness was doubled by the fact that he had been obliged to enclose, with Jean's fatal letter, two bills, at six months and a year, to settle his debt and the interest. How should he meet these bills? How explain to Divonne? He shuddered even to think of it, and pained his nephew, when the talk finished, he said to him sadly, his great long nose overshadowing his face, and shaking his pipe :

"Well, good-night ; in any case, you have acted for the best."

At last came her reply, and at the first lines :

"My dear old man, I have not written you sooner, because I waited to prove to you, other-

wise than with words, how much I understand and love you——”

Jean paused, surprised as a man who hears a symphony when he is expecting his teeth set on edge with a discord. He turned quickly to the last page and read :

“—remain until death your dog who loves you, whom you may beat, and who kisses you passionately——”

She had surely not got his letter ! Yet, read line by line, with tears in his eyes—it was unquestionably an answer. Fanny had long expected the bad news of the distress at Castelet, bringing about the inevitable separation. She had at once gone in quest of work so as not to be a burden to him, and had got a place as manageress of a private hotel in the Avenue du Bois-de-Boulogne on behalf of a very rich lady. A hundred francs a month, board and lodging, and leave on Sundays.

“ You understand, old man, one whole day every week to love one another, for you are still willing, are you not ? You will reward me for the great effort I am making, in working for the first time in my life, for enduring this slavery night and day, with its humiliations that you can have no idea of, and which will try to the utmost my craze to be independent. But I feel

a peculiar satisfaction in suffering for love of you. I owe you so much ; you have made me understand so much that is good and honest, of which no one had ever spoken to me ! Ah ! if we had only met sooner ! But you were still unable to walk at a time when I was lying in men's arms. Yet no one could ever boast he inspired me with such a resolution in order to keep to him a day longer. Now, come back as soon as you like ; the rooms are ready for you. I have taken all my things ; that was the hardest of all—routing out drawers and keepsakes. You will only find my portrait, that will cost you nothing—only the kind looks which I ask for it. Ah, sweetheart ! Well, if you will only keep Sunday for me, and my place on your breast—my place you know——” and then, fondling and wheedling, the voluptuous cossetting of a mother cat, and words of passion which made the lover rub his face against the glossy paper, as if he could extract from it a warm, human caress.

“ Does she say anything about my bills ? ” asked Uncle Césaire timidly.

“ She sends them back to you. You are to pay her when you are rich.”

His uncle gave a sigh of relief, and with subtle gravity, his temples wrinkled with satis-

faction, he said in his loud southern accents :

“ Do you know what I think ? The woman is a saint.”

Then, passing to another train of thought, with a caprice and complete lack of logic and memory—one of the ludicrous points in his nature :

“ And what passion, my boy, what fire ! My mouth waters at the thought of it, as when Courbebaisse read me La Mornas' letters.”

Once more Jean had to go through that first journey to Paris, the Hotel Cujas, Pellicule ; but his thoughts were elsewhere as he leant out of the window in the quiet night, so brilliantly bathed in the light of the full moon that the cocks were deceived, and saluted it as the dawning day.

It was true, then, that redemption through love of which the poets sang ; he was proud to think that whereas the great and famous men whom Fanny had loved before him, so far from raising her, had thrust her lower still, whilst he, by the sole force of his goodness, would, perhaps, rescue her from vice for evermore.

He felt grateful that she had hit upon

a middle course, a partial breaking of the bonds, through which she would learn new habits of work so difficult to her indolent nature ; and he wrote the next day in a fatherly fashion, like an old man, to encourage her reform, and to express his uneasiness at the kind of hotel she was managing, and the people who went there. He mistrusted her susceptibility and the facility with which she would excuse the surrender of herself :

“ What can you expect ? ” I can’t help it.”

By return of post, with the docility of a little girl, Fanny drew a picture of the hotel, a real family hotel, frequented by foreigners. On the first floor some Peruvians, father and mother, a lot of children and servants ; on the second, some Russians and a rich Dutch coral merchant. The rooms on the third floor lodged two riders at the Hippodrome, swell Englishmen, highly respectable ; and a most interesting little household, Mademoiselle Minna Vogel, a zither player from Stuttgart, with her brother Leo, a poor little consumptive fellow, obliged to abandon his clarionette lessons at the Paris Conservatoire, and whom his elder sister had come to nurse, without means except the proceeds of a few concerts that paid for board and lodging.

" You see, dear old fellow, nothing could be more touching or proper. As for myself, I pass as a widow, and am treated with the greatest respect. I would not allow it to be otherwise. Your wife must be respected. When I say ' your wife ' do not misunderstand me. I know that one day you will leave me, that I shall lose you, but after that, never another. I shall remain yours for ever, cherishing the taste of your kisses and the good instincts which you have roused in me. It sounds rather funny, does it not? Sapho virtuous! Yes, virtuous when you will have gone; but for you I remain what you have loved, madly and ardently—I adore you!"

All at once Jean became heart-sick and weary. The returning prodigal son compares the joy of meeting, the feast off fatted calf, and the tender solicitude—they always suffer in the process—with the delight of Bohemian life, and he regrets the bitter acorns and the lazy flocks. It is a disenchantment that attaches to persons and things suddenly deprived of a special attraction.

He no longer felt a healthy briskness in

the Provençal winter mornings ; there was no attraction in hunting the pretty reddish-brown otter along the banks, or in shooting the ducks in old Abrien's pond. He found the wind unpleasant, the water rough, and very monotonous the walks among the flooded vineyards, with his uncle explaining his system of sluices, dams and supply-trenches.

The village where he had gone during the pleasant walks of the first few days, with its old huts, some of them empty, now put him in mind of the death and desolation of an Italian village ; and when he went to the post he was obliged to endure, on the shaky doorstep of each, the never-ending repetitions of the old men, bent like trees exposed to the wind, and wearing pieces of knitted stockings on their arms ; or to old women whose chins under their close-fitting caps were the colour of yellow boxwood, with small glassy eyes twitching like those of the lizards on the old walls.

Always the same lamentations over the death of the vines, the failure of the madder crop, or the disease of the mulberry trees—the seven plagues of Egypt ruining this beautiful country of Provence ; and, to avoid them, he returned sometimes by the steep alleys

running alongside the old walls of the Chateaudes-Papes, or by the deserted lanes choked with brushwood, and the "grass of Saint Roch," that cure diseases of the skin, and which seem quite in their proper place in this corner of the Middle Ages, under the shadow of the vast ruin rising high above the road.

Then the Curé Malassagne would meet him when coming from mass, descending the hill with giant strides, his bands askew, his cassock held up in both hands to escape the briars and teazles. The priest would stop and thunder against the godlessness of the peasants, and the infamy of the Town Council ; he hurled his maledictions on the fields, the beasts and the men, wretches who never went to church, who buried their dead without the sacraments, and tried to heal themselves by magnetism or spiritualism, to spare themselves the priest and the doctor.

" Yes, sir, spiritualism ! ' That is what our Comtat peasants have come to. No wonder the vines are diseased ! "

Jean, who had Fanny's letter open and burning in his pocket, would listen absently, escape the priest's homily as quickly as possible, and returning to Castelet, would

stow himself in the hollow of a rock, in what the Provençals call a "cagnard," a shelter from the wind which whistles all around, and which concentrates the warmth of the sun as it radiates from the stone.

He would choose the one most secluded and surrounded by the wildest brambles and kermes oaks ; he would lie full length to read his letter. Little by little, from the delicate scent which it exhaled, from the caressing words, and the scenes which it conjured up, there would creep over him a sensual intoxication which quickened his pulse, and by an hallucination would wipe away as so much useless surrounding the river, the wooded islands, the village in the hollows of the Alpillles, and the whole curve of the immense valley where the gusts of wind pursued the dust, and rolled it along in clouds. He was far away, in their room, in the front of the railway station, with its grey roof, tormented by mad caresses, and furious desires, that made them cling to each other with the contortions of drowning persons.

All at once steps are on the path, and ringing laughs.

" He's there ! "

. His sisters appear—little bare legs amongst

the lavender—led by old Miracle, very proud at finding his master, and wagging his tail triumphantly ; but Jean would send him flying with a kick, and decline the timid offers to play hide-and-seek or race. And yet he loved these little twin sisters who were passionately fond of their big brother, always so far away ; and he made a child of himself to please them since the moment of his arrival, amused at the contrast between these pretty mites, born at the same time, but who were yet so little like one another. The one was tall, dark, with curly hair, at once mystical and wilful ; it was she who, carried away by the priest's readings, had conceived the idea of the boat, and this little Egyptian Marie had persuaded the fair Marthe, who was soft and gentle, like her mother and brother.

But how terribly embarrassing it was, whilst stirring up these memories, to have the coaxings of these little children mingling with coquettish perfume from his mistress's letter.

“ No ; go away. I must work.”

And he would return to the house, intending to shut himself up in his own room, when his father's voice would call him in passing.

“Is that you, Jean? Come and listen to this.”

The post often brought fresh cause for moroseness in a man already gloomy by nature, and who had acquired in the East a habit of silent gravity abruptly broken by recollections—“When I was consul at Hong Kong”—an outburst like the crackling of wood on a large fire. While he listened to his father reading and discussing the morning papers, Jean would look at Caoudal’s Sapho on the chimney-piece, her arms clasping her knees, the lyre at her side—“the whole lyre”—a bronze bought twenty years before, amongst other nick-nacks for Castelet; and this common bronze, so repulsive to him in the shop windows of Paris, here in his loneliness excited an amorous feeling, a desire to kiss those shoulders, to enfold those cold and polished arms, to have said to him:

“Sapho, she is yours, and yours only!”

The image-temptress would rise when he went out of the room, walk with him, and echo the sounds of his steps on the great stately staircase. It was Sapho’s name to the rhythm of which the old clock ticked, which the wind whispered through the cold stone corridors of the festival dwelling—her name which he

found in all the books of that country-house library, old volumes with red edges, between the leaves of which were still to be found the crumbs of his boyhood's meals. And this besetting memory of his mistress followed him even into his mother's room where Divonne was doing the invalid's hair, brushing back the beautiful white tresses from her face, still calm and rosy, in spite of long and never-ending agony.

"Ah! here's Jean," his mother would say. But his aunt, with her bare neck, her little cap, her sleeves turned up for this toilet of which she had the sole charge, reminded him of other *deshabilles*, and conjured up his mistress as she would jump out of bed in the clouds of her first cigarette. He was angry with himself for such thoughts, in this room above all! Yet what could he do to escape them?

"Our boy is no longer the same, sister," said Madame Gaussin sadly. "What ails him?" And, together, they would try to puzzle out the reason. Divonne racked her simple mind; she would have questioned the young man, but he seemed to avoid her now, so as not to be alone with her.

Once, having followed him, she came and

surprised him in the "cagnard," in the fever of his letters and bad dreams. He rose, looking gloomy. She detained him, and seated herself by his side on the warm stone :

" You love me no longer then ? I'm no longer your Divonne to whom you used to tell all your troubles ? "

" Yes, yes," he stammered, confused by her tender manner, and turned away his eyes, that she might not discover in them anything of what he had been reading, cries of love, despairing appeals, the frenzy of a distant passion.

" What's the matter ? Why are you so sad ? " murmured Divonne, with that wheedling voice and gesture that one uses with children. He was still her boy, still no more than ten years old—the age when little men get their promotion.

Already hot from reading, he was excited by the irresistible charm of this beautiful body so near his own, by the fresh mouth, its colour heightened by the breeze which blew her hair in delicate waves over her forehead in the Parisian fashion. And Sapho's lessons, " all women are alike ; in the presence of a man they have only one idea," made him think the peasant's happy smile, and her

gesture to detain him in tender conversation, were intended as a challenge.

Suddenly, an evil temptation came over him ; and the effort which he made to resist it shook him like an aspen leaf. Divonne was frightened to see him so pale, his teeth chattering.

“ Ah ! poor boy ! he has got a fever.”

With a move of ‘unreflecting tenderness she took off her large neckerchief to put it round his neck ; but suddenly seized, enfolded, she felt the heat of a mad caress on her neck, her shoulders, on all the dazzling flesh which had just been exposed to the sun. She had no time to cry out, or to defend herself ; perhaps she had not even a true idea of what had happened.

“ Ah ! I’m mad, I’m mad ! ” He was making off, already far distant over the common, the stones of which crashed with a sinister sound under his feet.

At breakfast that day Jean announced that he was leaving the same evening, recalled by an order from the Minister.

“ Going away, already ! but you said—you have only just come.”

And then an avalanche of cries and supplicatings. But he could stay no longer ; the

disturbing and corrupting influence of Sapho came between all their tenderness. Besides, had he not made a great sacrifice for them in giving up living with her. The complete separation would come about later ; and he would then return without shame or fear to the embraces of all these good people.

It was night, the house asleep, the lights out, when Césaire returned from seeing his nephew to the train at Avignon. He had given his horse some corn, and had looked closely at the sky—the search of men who live on the soil for weather signs—and was going into the house, when he saw a white form on a seat on the terrace.

“ Is that you, Divonne ? ”

“ Yes, I was waiting for you.”

Very busy all day, separated from her Fénat whom she adored, they used to meet like this in the evening to talk, or to take a walk together. Was it the short scene between Jean and herself, now more clearly understood than she cared for, now that she had thought it over, or the emotion at having seen the poor

mother weeping silently all day ? Her voice was strange, and her mind troubled to a degree that was unusual with her, a calm woman of duty.

" Do you know anything ? Why did he leave so suddenly ? "

She did not believe this story of the Minister, suspecting rather some evil attachment which was dragging the boy far from his family. So many dangers, so many fatal meetings in that Paris of perdition !

Césaire, who could hide nothing from her, confessed that there was, in fact, a woman in Jean's life, but a good creature, incapable of estranging him from his people ; and he spoke of her devotion, the touching letters she wrote, and praised above all the courageous resolution to work which she had taken, a thing which seemed only natural to the peasant woman.

" For after all, one must work to live."

" Not such women," said Césaire.

" Was it then a good-for-nothing baggage with whom Jean lived ? And you went to see him there ? "

" I swear to you, Divonne, that since she has known him there is no purer, no better woman. Love has reformed her."

But such distinctions were too subtle for Divonne. For her, this lady came under the name of what she called "bad women," and the thought that *hér* Jean was the prey of such a creature filled her with indignation. If the consul should hear of it !

Césaire tried to quiet her, and with his jolly and rather sensuous wrinkled face, assured her that at the boy's age he could not do without a woman.

"Well, then, let him marry," she said, with a touching conviction.

"After all, they are no longer together ; it's always something."

"Listen, Césaire," she replied, in a grave voice ; "you know that they say 'The evil that a man does lives after him.' If what you tell me is true, that Jean has really lifted this woman out of the gutter, he has very likely soiled himself sadly in the task. Possibly, he has made her better and chaster ; but who can tell that the evil in her has not corrupted our child to the heart ?"

They went back towards the terrace. A peaceful and clear night ; over the silent valley nothing was moving but the gleaming moonlight, the rolling stream, the ponds like streaks of silver. There was breathed

the quiet, the remoteness from all, the profound repose of dreamless slumber. Suddenly the up-train at full speed made its rumbling sound heard along the banks of the Rhone.

“ Oh, Paris ! Paris ! ” said Divonne, shaking her fist towards the enemy on whom the country vents all its wrath. “ Paris ! what do we give you, what do you give us back ? ”

CHAPTER VII

THE afternoon was cold and foggy, dusky at four o'clock, even in the wide avenue of the Champs Elysées, where the carriages rolled along with muffled sound. It was with difficulty that Jean read from the end of a little garden, with open gate, the large gold letters, above the mezzanine floor of a house which had the luxurious and quiet appearance of a villa: "Furnished apartments, family boarding-house." A brougham was waiting close to the pavement.

Opening the door of the office, Jean saw Fanny at once. She was sitting in the light of the window turning over a large account-book, facing another woman, tall and elegant, with a handkerchief and a little reticule in her hands.

"What is it you wish, sir?"

Fanny recognised him, rose dumfounded, and passed in front of the lady.

"It's the youngster," she said, in a low voice.

The other looked Gaussin up and down,

with the cynical coolness of experience, and then added aloud, without embarrassment :

“ Kiss one another, my children. I’m not looking at you.”

Then she took Fanny’s place, and continued checking the figures.

They had taken each other’s hands, and were whispering foolish nothings :

“ How are you ? ”

“ Pretty well, thanks.”

“ Then you started yesterday evening ? ”

But their strained voices gave the words their true meaning. And, seated on the sofa, recovering herself a little :

“ You did not recognise my mistress ? ” asked Fanny, in a low voice ; “ yet you have seen her before, at Déchelette’s ball, as a Spanish bride ; a little faded, though ! ”

“ Then she is——”

“ Rosario Sanchès, de Potter’s woman.”

This Rosario, Rosa with intimate friends, whose name was written on all the night-restaurant mirrors, and always in connection with some obscenity, was an old charioteer at the Hippodrome, notorious in the gay world for her cynically shameless life and her smart sayings ; which were the rage among

club-men whom she managed as she did her horses.

A Spaniard from Oran, she had been handsome rather than pretty. Her tawny black eyes, and eyebrows joining in one straight line, were still sufficiently seductive by gaslight; but herè, even between the lights, she looked all the fifty years that were stamped on her hard, insipid face, her wrinkled skin yellow as the lemons of her own country. She had been intimate with Fanny Legrand for years, and had chaperoned her in gay life. Her very name horrified the lover.

Fanny, who understood the meaning of his trembling arm, tried to excuse herself. To whom could she have gone to find employment? She was really very much embarrassed. Besides, Rosa was keeping quiet now; she was rich, very rich, living in her mansion in the Avenue de Villiers, or at her villa at Enghein, seeing a few old friends, but receiving one lover only, always the same one, her musician.

"De Potter?" asked Jean. "I thought he was married."

"Yes, married, and with children. It appears even that his wife is pretty, but that did not prevent him returning to his

old mistress ; and if you could only see how she speaks to him, how she treats him. Oh ! he is very badly bitten." She pressed his hand in tender reproach.

The lady at that moment paused in her reading, and spoke to her reticule which was shifting about at the end of its cord.

"Come, keep quiet !" Then, to the manageress, in a tone of command : "Quick, give me a piece of sugar for Bichito !"

Fanny rose and brought the sugar, which she held near the mouth of the reticule with little pettings and childish expressions.

"Look at the pretty creature," said she to her lover, showing him, all cosy with wadding, a kind of large lizard, ugly, rough, crested, serrated, with a hooded head of shivering slimy flesh ; a chameleon sent to Rosa from Algeria, and which she was keeping through the Parisian winter by dint of attentions and warmth. She adored it as she had never loved a man ; and Jean recognised at once, from Fanny's fond endearments, the position which the horrible beast held in the house.

The lady shut up the book, ready to start.

"Not so bad for the second fortnight. But, do look sharp after the candles."

With a look of ownership she glanced round the smart, well-kept little room upholstered in stamped velvet, blew a little dust off a yucca on a round table, and noticed a hole in the lace curtains, after which she said to the young people, with a knowing wink :

"No nonsense, children ; the house is very proper," and getting into the carriage waiting for her at the door, she went to take her drive in the Bois.

"Would you believe I was so plagued ? " said Fanny. "She or her mother come down upon me twice a week. The mother is much worse than she is, much meaner. I must love you a lot to stop in this shanty. At all events, you are here. I have got you again ! I was so afraid——"

She clasped him in her arms, and lip to lip satisfied herself by the trembling kiss that he was still all to her. People were going to and fro in the hall, and they had to be careful. When the lamp was brought, she sat in her usual place, some work in her hands, he close to her, as if he were a visitor.

"Am I changed at all ? Am I altogether different to myself ? "

She smiled, showing her crochet-work, which she handled as awkwardly as a little girl.

She had always hated needlework ; a book, her piano, her cigarette, or sleeves rolled up to prepare some dainty—she had never busied herself in any other way. But here, what was there to do ? The drawing-room piano ? She could not dream of such a thing all day, her place was in the office. Novels ? She could tell better stories than they did. So, in default of the forbidden cigarette, she had to take to this lace work which occupied her fingers, which left her free to think ; she could now understand why women would go in for these fiddling occupations, such as she had once despised.

And whilst she was catching up her thread with the clumsy care of a beginner, Jean watched her in her neat dress, little stiff collar, hair dressed flat on the antiquesly-round head, and her thoroughly straightforward and rational expression. Outside, the crowd of fashionable women rolled by in all their luxury of dress, perched up on their phaetons, returning to the noisy boulevards. Fanny did not appear to have a single regret for this glaring and triumphant vice in which she could have sustained her part, but which she had given up for his sake. Provided he would see her from time to time, she would

accept gladly her life of slavery ; she would even look on the bright side of it. All the lodgers liked her. The women, foreigners, without taste, consulted her about their purchases. In the morning she gave singing lessons to the eldest of the little Peruvian girls, and advised the gentlemen as to books to read or plays to see ; they treated her with every respect and attention, one especially, the Dutchman on the second floor.

“ He sits where you are, remains in contemplation until I say to him : ‘ Kuyper, you are in my way.’ Then he says ‘ pien,’ and goes off. He gave me this little coral brooch. You know, it’s worth about five francs ; I took it for the sake of peace.”

A waiter entered with a loaded tray which he put on one side of the table, shifting the green plant a little.

“ I dine here alone an hour before the table d’hôte.”

She selected two dishes on the long and plentiful bill of fare—she had a right to two courses and soup only.

“ Isn’t she stingy, that Rosario ? However, I would rather dine here ; there is no occasion to talk, and I can read your letters to keep me company.”

She disturbed herself again to get a tablecloth and some napkins ; every moment there was an order to give, a cupboard to open, a claim to satisfy. Jean saw that he would hinder her if he stayed longer ; besides, her dinner was ready. It was so pitiful the little soup tureen holding one portion, smoking on the table, gave them both the same thought, the same regret for the old times together !

“ Only till Sunday,” she murmured softly, as she sent him away. And as they could not kiss one another before the servants, or the lodgers, who were coming downstairs, she took his hand, and squeezed it long enough on her bosom to make the caress enter there.

All the evening, all night, he thought of her ; worrying about her humiliating slavery under that old harridan and her great lizard ; then he was uneasy when he thought of the Dutchman ; so that until Sunday he hardly lived. As a matter of fact this partial separation, which was to prepare the way for the final break, had the same effect on them as a pruner’s knife on a half-dead tree—it gave new life to their intrigue. Almost every day

they wrote one another affectionate notes with lover-like impatience ; or, better still, when he left the office they had a delicious confab in her room during the slack hour for needlework.

“ One of my relations,” was what she had given out at the hôtel, and under cover of this vague description he could sometimes pass the evening in her room, as though he were a thousand leagues from Paris. He made the acquaintance of the Peruvian family, with its flock of gaudily-dressed young women, ranged round the drawing-room like birds on a perch. He listened to Mademoiselle Minna Vogel on the zither—she was garlanded like a hop-pole—and saw her consumptive brother following passionately the rhythm of the music, nodding his head, and running his fingers over an imaginary clarionette—the only one he was allowed to play. He played whist with Fanny’s Dutchman, a great bald-headed numbskull, with a sordid look, who had navigated all the oceans of the world, and who, asked for some information about Australia, would reply, rolling his eyes : “ Just fancy the price of potatoes at Melbourne,” having never been struck but by this one fact—the dearness of potatoes in all countries he visited.

Fanny was the life of these assemblies ; she chatted, sang and played the well-informed and worldly Parisian. Any traces of Bohemia or the studio either escaped the notice of these aliens, or seemed to them the height of taste. She dazzled them with her stories concerning the celebrities of art and literature ; gave the Russian lady, who doted on Dejoie's novels, particulars as to the novelist's method of work, the number of cups of coffee he drank in a night, the exact and absurd sum which the publishers of " Cenderinette " had paid him for the masterpiece which had made their fortune. His mistress's popularity made Gaussin so proud that he forgot to be jealous, and would have upheld her veracity through thick and thin, if anyone had doubted it.

He admired her, in this quiet drawing-room lighted by the shaded lamps, pouring out tea, accompanying the young girls' songs, and giving them the advice of an elder sister ; but it was a sharp contrast when she arrived at his place on Sunday morning, drenched and shivering.

Without even approaching the fire, which was blazing in her honour, she quickly undressed and slipped into the large bed by the side of her lover. Then what embraces,

what long caresses—all the restraints of the week avenged, all privation of each from the other which kept their amorous desires alive !

The hours passed ; they lost count of time ; they did not stir from bed until evening. There was no temptation to go out, no gaiety, not even the Hettemas, who, to economise, had decided to live in the country. The little breakfast ready beside them, they heeded little of the rumbling of the Parisian Sunday in the muddy streets, the whistle of the trains, the rolling of the loaded cabs, or the rain falling in large drops on the zinc of the balcony. The quick palpitations of their breasts beat time to this absence of life, without a notion of the hour, till dusk.

The gas, which was being lit outside on the opposite side of the way, threw a soft gleam of light on the hangings, and then they had to get up ; Fanny had to be in at seven. In the half-light of the room, all her annoyances, all her disgusts came back to her, more weighty, more cruel, as she put on her boots, still wet from her walk, her petticoats, her working dress, the black uniform of poor women.

And the beloved objects around only served to ~~increase~~ her regret—the furniture, the

little dressing-room of the happy days. She tore herself away.

“ Let us go ! ”

Jean escorted her so that they might be as long together as possible ; and, keeping close to each other, they walked leisurely up the Avenue des Champs Elysees, the double row of gas-standards, with the Arc de Triomphe at the end, far off in the shadow, and two or three stars twinkling in a patch of sky, making a kind of diorama. At the corner of the Rue Pergolese, close to the hotel, she raised her little veil for a good-bye kiss, and left him, disconcerted, disgusted with his rooms, to which he went back as late as possible, cursing his wretchedness, almost angry with them at Castelet for the sacrifice he was making for their sakes.

Two or three months dragged on in this way, but the life became absolutely insupportable at last. The servants having been gossiping, Jean was forced to restrict his visits to the hotel, while Fanny got more and more exasperated at the greed of the Sanchès, mother and daughter. She thought silently of living together again, and surmised that her lover, too, was coming round ; but she wanted him to speak first.

One Sunday in April Fanny came more smartly dressed than usual, in a round hat, a very simple spring costume—she was not rich—which showed off her graceful figure.

“Get up quick ; we are going to breakfast in the country.”

“In the country ? ”

“Yes, at Enghien, with Rosa. She has invited us both.”

He said “No” at first, but she insisted. Rosa would never forgive them if they refused. “You can well consent for my sake. I think I do enough.”

It was on the borders of the lake at Enghien, with an immense lawn sloping down to a little bay on which were riding some little yawls and gondolas. A large cottage, wonderfully decorated and furnished, the ceilings and panel-mirrors reflecting the shimmering water, and superb elms in a park which was already beautiful with early foliage and lilac flowers. The correct liveries, the walks, with not a twig awry, did honour to the two-fold supervision of Rosario and old Pilar.

On arrival, they found them all at table, a wrong direction having sent them wandering, an hour out of their way, round the lake and through lanes bounded by high garden

walls. The cold reception of the mistress of the house, angry at waiting, and the extraordinary appearance of the old crones, to whom Rosa, in her carter's voice, introduced them, completed Jean's confusion. These "elegantes"—the name by which famous courtesans speak of themselves—these three old trollops who had been counted among the glories of the Second Empire, owned names as those of a great poet or a victorious general — Wilkie Cob, Sombreuse, Clara Desfous.

Certainly, they were elegant still, in spring-coloured costumes of the latest fashion, gorgeously rigged-out from collar to boots ; but so faded, painted and powdered ! Sombreuse, without eyelashes, her eyes glassy and a hanging lip, was fumbling about for plate, fork and glass ; Desfous, unwieldy and blotchy, a hot-water bottle at her feet, spread out on the cloth her poor gout-twisted fingers with their sparkling rings, as difficult to get on and off as the rings of a puzzle. And Cob was very thin—with a girlish figure, set off most hideously by an emaciated head which, surmounted by a mass of yellow tow, was like that of a sick clown. Ruined and sold up, she had been to Monte Carlo to try her

luck, and had returned without a sou, madly in love with a handsome croupier, who would have nothing to do with her. Rosa, having picked her up, was keeping her, and was making much of doing so.

All these women knew Fanny, and saluted her in a patronising way.

“How are you, little one?”

The fact was that, dressed in stuff at three francs a yard, without an ornament except Kuyper's red brooch, she looked like a novice among these ghastly veterans in harlotry, whose luxurious setting made them look more horrible still in the blaze of light reflected from lake and sky, which entered, loaded with spring fragrance, by the dining-room doors.

Old Mother Pilar was there, too, the “chingé,” as she even named herself in her Franco-Spanish gibberish, a true baboon, with faded, shrivelled skin, a brutal maliciousness on her grinning features, her grey hair close-cropped as a boy's, and over her old black satin dress a large blue yachtsman's collar.

“And don't forget Monsieur Bichito,” said Rosa, concluding the introductions by showing Gaussin a heap of pink wadding on the cloth where the chameleon was shivering.

"Well, and what have I done? Am I to be left out in the cold?" complained a big grizzly-moustached fellow, well-groomed but rather stiff in his fancy waistcoat and high collar, his tone one of forced joviality.

"Well, I never! That's so; what about Tatave?" said the women, laughing. The mistress of the house named him with indifference.

Tatave was de Potter, the clever composer, the popular author of "Claudia" and "Savanarola." Jean, who had only had a glimpse of him at Déchelette's, was surprised to find the great artist so wanting in geniality—a wooden mask, hard and unbending; a mad, incurable passion stamped his colourless eyes. For years it had bound him to this vile jade; caused him to leave wife and children, and remain a "tame cat" in a house where he dissipated part of his large fortune and the royalties from the theatres, and where he was treated worse than a servant. It was a sight to witness Rosa's bored look when he began some story, and the contemptuous way in which she silenced him. Pilar, outcapping her daughter, never failed to add in a decided tone, and using an obscene expression :

“ Shut up, my boy ! ”

She was Jean's neighbour ; and those old chops, champing the food like some animal, and her inquisitive glance at his plate, tortured the young man, already embarrassed by Rosa's patronising manner as she chaffed Fanny about the musical evenings at the hotel, and the verdancy of the poor simpletons who looked upon the manageress as a lady who had come down in the world. The circus performer, bloated with unwholesome fat, with uncut stones worth ten thousand francs in each ear, appeared to begrudge her friend the renewal of youth and beauty with which her young lover had endowed her. Fanny not only kept her temper, but she amused all the table, turning the lodgers into ridicule ; burlesquing the Peruvian who confided to her—rolling the whites of his eyes—his wish to know a “ grande coucoute,” and the dumb wooing of the Dutchman, blowing like a porpoise, and gasping behind her chair

“ How — much — should — you — say potatoes — cost — in — Batavia ? ”

Jean for his part, felt little like laughing, and Pilar hardly more so, being too much occupied in keeping an eye on her

daughter's silver plate ; or, seeing a fly on a dish in front of her, or on her neighbour's sleeve, suddenly capturing it, and presenting it, jabbering fond words, " Eat, mi alma ; eat, mi corazon," to the repulsive little beast stranded on the cloth, withered, wrinkled and shapeless as Desfous's fingers.

Occasionally, having scattered all the flies, she saw one on the sideboard, or on the glass—and, jumping up, caught it triumphantly. This by-play, often repeated, annoyed her daughter, who was decidedly very nervous that morning.

" Don't jump up every moment ; it's wearying."

In a similar voice, but with the jargon more marked, the mother answered :

" You are gorging yourself, why don't you wish him to eat ? "

" Leave the table or keep quiet ; you plague us."

The old woman bluntly refused, and the two began to abuse one another like pious Spaniards, mixing up the devil and hell with the blasphemy of the gutter.

" Hija del demonio."

" Cuerno de Satanás."

" Puta ! "

“ Mi madre ? ”

Jean looked at them terrified, whilst the other guests, accustomed to these family scenes, went on quietly with their meal. Only de Potter interposed out of regard for the stranger.

“ Come now ! don't quarrel.”

But Rosa turned on him in a fury.

“ What are you putting your spoke in for ? There's manners for you ! Can't I speak ? Go home to your wife, and see if I'm there ! I've had enough of your fried whiting's eyes, and the three hairs still left you. Take them back to the silly fool ; it's about time.”

De Potter, rather pale, smiled.

“ And I must live with this thing ! ” he muttered in his moustache.

“ This thing's as good as that,” she yelled, her whole body stretched over the table. “ Go to the devil—the door's open, you know ; out you go ! ”

“ Come ! come ! Rosa,” implored the poor spiritless eyes.

And Mother Pilar, going on eating, said with such a comical indifference, and with the same obscene expression : “ Shut up, my boy ! ” that everyone burst out laughing,

even Rosa, and de Potter, who kissed his still muttering mistress, and to completely mollify her caught a fly and presented it gingerly, by the wings, to Bichito,

This was de Potter, the famous composer, the pride of the French school ! By what means did this woman retain her hold on him, by what witchery, old as she was in vice, coarse, with a mother twice as vile as she, and showing, as if seen in a crystal, what Rosa would be in twenty years' time ?

Coffee was served by the lake, in a little rock-work grotto, the interior hung with bright silks watered by the reflected rippling of the water close by ; one of those enchanting lovers' nooks invented by the stories of the eighteenth century, with a mirror in the ceiling which reflected the attitudes of the old harridans sprawling on the broad sofa in the sloth of digestion, and Rosa, her cheeks flushed beneath the paint, lying on her back, and stretching out her arms to the musician.

" Oh ! my Tatave ! my Tatave ! "

But this warmth of tenderness evaporated with that of the chartreuse ; and the idea of a row on the lake occurring to one of the ladies, she sent de Potter to get the boat ready.

" The gondola, you know, not the canoe. "

"Suppose I tell Désirè ?"

"Désirè is at breakfast."

"I mentioned it because the gondola is full of water ; it must be baled out, and that is a long job."

"Jean will go with you, de Potter," said Fanny, who saw that another scene was brewing.

Seated facing one another, legs wide apart, they baled away vigorously without speaking or looking at one another, as if hypnotised by the rhythm of the water falling from the two balers. A large catalpa cast its fragrant shade about them, and was reflected on the dazzling water.

"Have you been long with Fanny ?" asked the composer suddenly, pausing in his work.

"Two years," said Gaussin, a little surprised.

"Only two years ! Then what you see to-day may, perhaps, be of service to you. I have lived twenty years with Rosa. It's twenty years since I returned from Italy, at the end of the three years "Prix-de-Rome"

scholarship. One evening I went to the Hippodrome and saw her standing in her little chariot, flying round the track, towering above me, whip in air, with her barred helmet and her coat of gold mail fitting close to her figure down to her thighs—if anyone had told me——”

And, beginning to bale again, he told how his people had only laughed at the entanglement at first; then, when things began to look serious, how many efforts, prayers, sacrifices, would his parents not have made to separate them. Two or three times the girl was bought off and left him, but he always rejoined her. “Let us see what travel will do,” his mother had said. He travelled, returned, and took her to live with him again. Then he consented to marry a pretty girl, with a rich dowry, and a promise of election to the Institute among the wedding presents. Three months afterwards he left the new home for the old one. “Ah! young man! young man!”

He told the story of his life in a dry voice, without moving a muscle, his face a masque as stiff as the starched collar which held it so erect. Boats passed them, loaded with students and girls, exuberant with song,

youthful laughter and animal spirits. How many of them, in the ignorance of youth, would have done well to stop and learn the terrible lesson !

During this time, as if the word had been given for their separation, the old " elegantes " were reasoning with Fanny Legrand in the kiosk.

" It's a pretty boy, but no money. . What can it lead to ? "

" Yes, but I love him ! " . . .

Rosa shrugged her shoulders.

" Let her alone, she will miss her Dutchman, as I have seen her miss all her good chances. After the Flamant affair she did try to become practical ; but here she is again, as stupid as ever ! "

" Ay ! vellaca," grunted Mamma Pilar. The Englishwoman with the clown's head chimed in with the horrible accent to which she had so long owed her success :

" It's very nice to love for Love's sake, little one ; a very fine thing is Love, you know, but we ought to love money too. For myself, now, if I were rich still, do you think my croupier would say I was ugly ? " She capered with rage, rising her voice to a shriek :

“ Oh ! it was too terrible. To have made a stir in the world, to have been known everywhere, like a monument, a boulevard ; so well known, indeed, that not a wretched cabman but knew at once where to drive when you said ‘ Wilkie Cob.’ To have had princes for footstools, and kings who, when I spat, said spitting was pretty ! And then this filthy blackguard, who would have nothing to do with me because I was ugly ; and I had not even enough money for one night with him ! ”

And irritated at the idea that it was possible to have been found ugly, she tore open her dress :

“ The face—yes, I sacrificed that ; but there ! the throat, the shoulders ! Are they not white, are they not firm ? ”

She wantonly exposed her witch’s flesh, still miraculously young after thirty years in the furnace, surmounted by a head faded and deathly, from the neck upwards.

“ Ladies, the boat is ready ! ” cried de Potter ; and the Englishwoman, fastening her dress again over what remained to her of youth, murmured with a comical despair :

“ It’s not possible, though, to walk about stark naked ! ”

The scene was worthy of a Lancret. The coquettish whiteness of the villas dazzled one amidst the vernal green, with the terraces, the lawns enclosing the little lake, all shimmering in the sun. What a scene it was in getting these worn-out hours under way! the blind Sombreuse, the old clown's head, and the paralytic Desfous, fouling the water-glade with the musky perfume of devices to hide the ravages of time.

Jean took the sculls, his head ^{down} down, ashamed and afraid lest he should be seen, and some base part in this sinister allegoric bark attributed to him. Happily, Fanny Legrand was seated in the stern opposite him, to gladden his heart and eyes, near the tiller which de Potter held—Fanny, whose smile had never seemed to him so youthful, by comparison, no doubt.

“Sing to us, little one,” said Desfous, getting sentimental under vernal influence.

In her expressive and deep voice Fanny began the barcarolle from “Claudia.” The composer, stirred by memories of this, his first great success, hummed with closed lips the

orchestration, rendering that ebb and flow which gives the melody a sparkle as of rippling water. At this time of day, and amid these surroundings, it was entrancing. Someone shouted "Bravo!" 'from an adjoining terrace; and the Provençal, beating time as he rowed, thirsted for this divine music from the lips of his mistress, and felt a temptation to place his mouth to the source, and to drink in the sun, his head thrown back, for ever.

All at oncê, 'Rosa furiously interrupted the melody; the blending of the voices incensed her. "I say, there! when you've done cooing to one another. Do you imagine you amuse us with that ghastly howling? That's quite enough of it. Besides it's late; Fanny must get back to the shop."

With a fierce gesture she pointed to the nearest landing-place.

"Land there," she said to her lover, "they will be nearer to the station."

The parting was brutal; but the old circus performer had familiarised her set with such manners, and no one dared to protest. The couple were pitchforked on the bank, with a few words of cool politeness to the young man, and some orders in a hissing voice to Fanny, the boat bearing

away amidst screams and disputes, which ended in an insulting shout of laughter, heard clearly over the water by the two lovers.

"Do you hear—do you hear?" said Fanny, pale with rage; "she's laughing at us."

All her humiliations and affronts rankling at this last insult, she told him of them on their way to the station—even owning things she had hitherto concealed. Rosa tried to alienate her from him, and to induce her to deceive him.

"What has she not said to persuade me to take the Dutchman? Just now they were all badgering me about it. I love you too much, you know, and that is out of keeping with her vices—she has all of them—the foulest, the most monstrous. And because I will not——"

She paused; she saw he was livid, his lips trembling as on the evening when he destroyed the letters.

"Oh! you need not be afraid," she said. "Your love has cured me of all those horrors. She and her dirty chameleon disgust me."

"I will not have you remain there any

longer," said her lover, maddened and sick with jealousy. "There is too much nastiness in the bread you earn. You shall come back to me ; we will manage somehow."

This cry was what she was waiting for ; she had long schemed for it. Yet she raised objections : it would be very difficult to manage with only his three hundred francs from the Ministry, and most likely they would have to part again.

"And I suffered so much on leaving our poor little home !"

Seats were placed at intervals under the acacias which lined the road, with swallows crowding the telegraph wires ; so, to talk the better—they were both very much affected—they sat down, arm-in-arm.

"Three hundred francs a month," said Jean ; "how then do the Hettenias manage ? They have but two hundred and fifty !"

"They live in the country, at Chaville, all the year round."

"Well, can't we do the same ? I'm not tied to Paris."

"Really ? Will you ? Oh ! sweetheart, sweetheart !"

People were about along the road, a crowd of donkeys carrying a returning wedding

party. They could not, therefore, seal it with a kiss, and continued motionless, snuggling up to one another, anticipating a happiness that was to return, when the summer came again, amid rural sweetness, the balmy quiet broken in the distance by the sound of the shooting galleries and the organs of a suburban fête.

CHAPTER VIII

THEY settled down at Chaville, between the lower and upper town, on the old forest road called the Pave des Gardes, in an old hunting-lodge on the borders of the wood. Three rooms scarcely bigger than those in Paris, the same furniture, from their old establishment—the cane armchair and the painted wardrobe—and nothing but Fanny's portrait to relieve the hideous green paper in their bedroom ; for the Castelet photograph got its frame broken in moving, and was fading away in the garret.

They scarcely spoke of poor Castelet since uncle and niece had ceased to correspond. "A pretty slippery customer," she said, recalling how Césaire encouraged their first separation. The little ones alone gave their brother the news. Divonne no longer wrote. Perhaps she had a grudge against her nephew ; or concluded that the bad woman had come back to open and criticise her poor motherly letters, written in a peasant's scrawling hand.

Occasionally they could have thought themselves back in the Rue d'Amsterdam, when they awoke with the singing of the Hettemas, who were again their neighbours, and the whistling of the trains which continually rushed past on the other side of the road, being visible through the branches of a large park. But in place of the dull glass roof of the Western Station, the bent shadows of the clerks looming through the curtainless windows and the noisy din in the hilly street, they had a green and quite open space beyond their little orchard surrounded by other gardens and cottages midst clumps of trees sloping down to the bottom of the hill.

Before he left in the morning, Jean breakfasted in the little dining-room, its casement opening on to a broad, paved, grass-grown road lined with hedges of strong-smelling hawthorn. It took him ten minutes to get to the station this way, alongside the leafy song-bound park; when he returned, these undertones gradually subsided as the lengthening shadows from the copses fell on the green, mossy road, enpurpled by the western sun; and the cuckoo cries from every corner of the wood mingled with the nightingales' thrilling notes from the ivy branches.

But no sooner had they settled down, and the novelty of the quietness of everything around them had worn off, than fits of futile and mopish jealousy again tormented the lover. The squabble of his mistress with Rosa, and her leaving the hotel, had brought about an explanation between the two women, with monstrous insinuations that fanned his suspicious and restless anxieties anew ; and when he went off, and from the train got a glimpse of the low house, its ground floor surmounted by a round dormer window, his thoughts penetrated the walls, and he said to himself :

“ Who knows ? ” And the idea pursued him, even in the routine of the office.

When he got back he insisted on having an account of the day's doings, even to the merest trifles ; and endeavoured to extract her inmost thoughts—often not worth telling—by suddenly asking, “ What are you thinking of ? ” always fearing that she regretted something or someone in that horrible past to which she invariably confessed with the same unshaken candour.

At all events when they saw one another only on Sunday, and were eager for each other, he had not troubled himself, with

these reproachful and minute moral inquiries. But re-united, again living together, even their caresses were full of torture, their most intimate moments stirred by sullen anger and a sad intuition of the hopelessness of it all ; he on his side exhausting himself in an endeavour to arouse in this flesh-glutted woman a sensation which she had never yet known ; and she ready to sacrifice herself to give him a pleasure that had ~~not~~ been the lot of ten others before him ; both failing to attain their desire, and weeping in omnipotent rage.

After a while they seemed to pull themselves together, perhaps because they got soaked with the soothing influences of Nature, or maybe, simpler still, the proximity of the Hettemas. There was certainly not another family who, having pitched its tent in the suburbs of Paris, tasted so much to the full the freedom of a country life—wearing their oldest clothes and pith hats, the wife corsetless, the husband in tatters ; and, meals finished, carrying crusts to the ducks, peelings to the rabbits—then weeding, raking, grafting, watering——

Oh ! the watering !

The Hettemas commenced it as soon as

the husband got back from the office and had exchanged his clothes for a Robinson Crusoe costume. They worked at it again after dinner, and long after nightfall, in the dark of the little garden with its fresh scent of damp earth, there was heard the grinding of the pump, the clatter of the water-cans and puffings and pantings among the beds, and a trickling that seemed to fall from the workers' faces into their watering-pots ; then from time to time a shout of triumph :

“ The greedy peas have had thirty-two ! ”

“ And I have given fourteen to the balsams ! ”

They were not merely satisfied with being happy ; they liked to turn it over and over, seeming to enjoy the taste of it till it made one's mouth water ; the husband especially, by the irresistible manner in which he related their joys of wintering together :

“ It is nothing now, but you'll see in December ! You get back muddy and wet, with all the worry of Paris on your back ; you find a good fire, a good light, the soup whiffing in the room, and under the table a pair of sabots stuffed with straw. Now, listen ! When you have punished a plate of cabbage and sausages, with a bit of *gruyere*

that has been kept fresh in a cloth, and when you have also got outside a bottle of 'ginglard'—which did not come by way of Bercy, but free of baptism and duty—is it not good to draw one's chair up to the fire, light a pipe, drink your coffee laced with brandy, and then take forty winks opposite one another, whilst the hoar-frost is tracing the window-panes. Only forty winks, just time to get over the worst of digestion. Afterwards one does a little drawing whilst the wife clears the table, sees to her own personal matters, turns down the bed clothes, and fills the hot-water bottle ; then when she is in bed and the place warm, you tumble in, your body warm all over, as if you had crept into the straw of your sabots."

This shaggy, heavy-jawed giant, usually so shy that he could not say two words without stammering and blushing, waxed almost eloquent on the subject.

This stupid bashfulness—a comical contrast to his black beard and colossal figure, had brought about his marriage and quiet life. At twenty-five, overflowing with vigour and health, Hettema was innocent of love or women. One day, at Nevers, after a club dinner, his comrades dragged him, half-drunk,

into a brothel and forced him to take his choice. He left the place unsettled in mind ; returned, chose the same girl each time, paid her debts, carried her off, and, alarmed at the idea that some one might take her from him, and that he would have to go through it all again, he ended by marrying her.

" A legalised couple, my dear," said Fanny exultingly to Jean, who listened, aghast. " The most proper and respectable, too, of all I have known."

She said it quite sincere in her ignorance ; no doubt the lawful households she had known deserved no other judgment ; all her notions of life were as false and as sincere as this one.

The Hettemas were quiet neighbours, always even-tempered, capable even of services, if not too much trouble, but having, above all, a horror of scenes, of quarrels in which they were asked to take sides ; and, in general, of anything which might disturb a good digestion. The wife tried to put Fanny in the way of raising fowls and rabbits, and to imbue her with the exciting joys of watering, but in vain.

Gaussin's mistress, town-bred, with the run of the studios, only cared for the country

as a place for junkettings and parties, where one could shout, roll and lose one's self with one's lover. She detested effort or work ; and six months as manageress had exhausted her active faculties for a long time to come. She yielded to a state of vague torpor—the intoxication of well-being and the open air—which deprived her almost of the strength to dress herself, do her hair, or even to open the piano.

The care of the household was left entirely to a working housekeeper from the neighbourhood ; so, in the evening, when she recounted the events of the day to Jean, she had nothing to tell of but a visit to Olympe, a bit of scandal over the fence, and cigarettes—heaps of them—the remains covered the marble hearth ! Six o'clock already ! Scarcely time to change her dress, or to pin a flower in her bosom, and to go and meet him on the green road.

But the autumn fogs and rain, and the early dusk gave her more than one excuse for not going out, and, frequently, he surprised her on his return in a white wool "gandoura," falling in large folds as she had put it on in the morning, her hair looped up as when he started. He thought her charming thus ; her neck still showed the bloom of youth ; her

flesh was tempting and well-cared-for ; and he knew she was ever ready for him. Still this state of degradation shocked him, alarmed him as would a peril.

He, himself, after working very hard to increase their income a little without recourse to Castelet—nights passed over plans, drawings of pieces of artillery caissons, rifles on a new model, which he did for Hettema—felt himself beset, all at once, by the paralysing influence of country life and its solitude, which spares not even the most vigorous or most active, the latent germs of which had been sown in a childhood spent in a far-away corner of nature.

The materialism of their huge neighbours helped to increase the feeling. It communicated itself to them in the continual goings and comings from one house to the other, with a little of the Hettemas' lower morality and gross appetite thrown in. So Gaussin and his mistress likewise found themselves gravely discussing the meals and the hour of going to bed. Césaire had sent them a puncheon of the "frog's wine," and they passed one whole Sunday in bottling it, the door of their little cellar opening out upon the last sun of the year, in a blue sky where

floated rosy clouds, the rosiness that of the heather. The time of warm, straw-stuffed sabots and short naps in front of the log fire were near at hand. Happily, they had a diversion.

One evening he found her very much upset. Olympe had just told her the story of a poor little child brought up by its grandmother at Morvan. The father and mother, wood-dealers in Paris, had ceased to write, nor had they paid anything for months. The grandmother having died suddenly, some lightermen had brought the brat by the Yonne canal to restore it to the parents; but they could not find them. The wood-yard was closed; the mother had gone off with a lover; the father, drunken and bankrupt, had disappeared. These "lawful" couples got on well! So there was the poor little mite, six years old, a little dear, without bread, or clothes, or home.

Tears came to her eyes, and then all at once :

" If only we could take it ! Will you ? "

" What madness ! "

" Why ? " And then, snuggling up to him, and coaxing him :

" You know how much I have wished, for a child by you ; we could bring him

up and educate him. One gets to love these little adopted ones after a time as much as if they were one's own."

She urged, too, the diversion it would be for her, alone all day, worried with a lot of wretched thoughts. A child, too, was a safeguard. Then, seeing him concerned at the expense :

"The expense is nothing. Fancy ! only six years old ! we can dress him with your old clothes. Olympe, who understands all about it, assures me that we should not even notice it."

"Why, then, doesn't she take him ?" said Jean, with the ill-humour of a man who feels himself beaten by his own weakness. He tried, however, to resist by the aid of the decisive objection :

"And when I'm no longer here ?"

He rarely spoke of his departure ; he did not wish to distress Fanny ; but he thought of it, thus reassured himself against the dangers of his life and de Potter's sad confidences.

"What a complication this child will be, what a burden on you in future !"

Fanny's face clouded :

"You are mistaken, my dear ; it will be someone to whom I can talk of you, a

comfort; a responsibility, too, which will give me strength to work, to feel an interest in life again."

He thought a moment, and pictured her all alone in the empty house :

"Where is the little one?"

"At Bas-Meudon, with a lighterman who has taken him in for a few days. After that there is but the alms-house—charity."

"Well, go and fetch him, since ~~you~~ wish it."

She sprang to his neck, and, pleased as a child, played and sang all the evening, happy, exuberant and transfigured. On the morrow, in the train, Jean spoke of their decision to burly Hetteima, who seemed to know all about it, but wishing not to be mixed up in it. From his corner, deep in the *Petit Journal*, he stammered behind his beard :

"Yes, I know, it's the ladies' doings, it doesn't concern me."

And raising his head over the top of the paper :

"I think your wife is very romantic," said he.

Romantic or not, there she was in the evening, in great trouble, on her knees, a plate of soup in her hand, trying to tame

the little lad from Morvan, who, bolt upright, but hanging back his enormous head with hair like tow, was refusing to talk, to eat, even to show his face, and repeating in a loud, sobbing and monotonous voice :

“ See Ménine ! See Ménine ! ”

Jean also tried his hand to make him swallow the soup, but without success. And they remained there, both kneeling on a level with him, one holding the plate, the other the spoon, as before a sick lamb, repeating kind and encouraging words to win him over.

“ Let’s have dinner, perhaps we frighten him ; he will eat if we don’t look at him.”

But he remained stock-still and sullen, his little savage whines of “ See Ménine ” melting their hearts, until he fell asleep, upright against the sideboard ; so soundly, indeed, that they were able to undress him, and put him to bed in the heavy country cradle borrowed of a neighbour, without his opening his eyes for a second.

“ See ! How pretty he is ! ” said Fanny, very proud of her acquisition ; and she constrained Gaussin to admire the obstinate face, its features well-formed and delicate under the swarthy skin ; the symmetrical

little body, with its broad back, thick arms and legs, like those of a baby faun, long and wiry, already downy in the lower extremities. She was oblivious of all else while contemplating his childish beauty.

"Cover him up, he will catch cold," said Jean, whose voice startled her as from a dream; and whilst she tucked him up gently, the little one, although asleep, gave vent to long broken sobs, the moans of despair.

During the night he talked to himself:

"Guerlaude me, Ménine."

"What does he say? Listen."

He wanted to be "guerlaude," but what did those strange words mean? At all events, Jean stretched out his arm, and began to rock the heavy cradle; gradually the child was quieted, and fell asleep again, thinking he was holding in his little, fat, dimpled hand that of his "Ménine," who had been dead a fortnight.

He was like a wild cat in the house—scratching, biting and eating alone; muttering when anyone went near his porringer. The few words which they got out of him were in the outlandish dialect of the Morvan woodcutters, which no one would have understood had it not been for the Hettemas,

who came from the same district. However, by dint of great care and kindness, they managed to tame him a bit—a “pso” as he put it. He was induced to change the tatters in which he had come for warm and clean clothes, the sight of which the first few days made him howl with rage, as if one were trying to dress up a jackal in a gréyhound’s rug. He learned to eat at table, the use of a fork and spoon, and to reply when they asked his name, that, at home, “i li dision Josaph.”

As for lessons, of the simplest kind even, it was not to be dreamed of yet. Brought up in the depths of a forest in a charcoal-burner’s hut, the sounds of rustling and swarming nature crowded into the hard noddle of the little forester, even as the roaring of the sea fills the spiral of a shell; and it was not the least good trying either to get anything else into it, or to keep him in the house, even in the most inclement weather. In rain or snow, when the bare trees were dressed in frostal coral, he made his escape, beating the bushes, digging into the burrows with the skilful cruelty of a ferret; and when he got back, perished with hunger, he always had in his fustian jacket, all jagged and tattered, or in the pocket of his little trousers

muddled to the waist some numbed or dead animal—bird, mole, field-mouse—or, if not, beetroots or potatoes pulled up in the fields.

Nothing could eliminate his instinct for poaching and looting. He was also possessed of an odd craze for secreting all sorts of shining odds and ends—brass buttons, jet beads, silver chocolate-paper—which he picked up and carried off to his magpie hiding-places. All this booty had for him a vague and generic name, “makings”; and neither persuasion nor clumps on the head could prevent him levying his “makings” on all and sundry.

The Hetteimas alone could keep him in order, the draughtsman having a dog-whip handy—on the table near which the young savage hovered, attracted by the compases and coloured pencils. This he cracked about his legs as occasion required. Neither Jean nor Fanny, however, could use such restraints; although the child proved himself cunning and distrustful of them, unwon, even though spoiled by being petted. It would appear that his “Ménine,” in dying, had deprived him of all further affection. Fanny, “because she stunk nice,” could keep him for a moment on her knees sometimes; but to Gaussin, who was really very kind to him, he was

ever the same wild beast as at first, regarding him suspiciously, with extended claws.

This unconquerable and almost instinctive antipathy of the child, the inexplicable hate of his little blue, albino-lashed eyes, and above all, the blind and instant affection of Fanny for a strangeling who had suddenly entered into their life, worried the lover with a new suspicion. Perhaps it was her own child, brought up by a nurse or at her step-mother's; and hearing of Machaume's death about this time, it seemed a coincidence to justify his anxiety. Occasionally in the night, when the little hand was fast holding his own—the child, in the uncertainty of sleep and dreamland, always thought he had hold of "Ménine"—he asked himself in his secret and untold trouble :

"Where have you come from? Who are you?" He hoped to divine by the heat of the little body the mystery of its birth.

An end was put to his anxiety, however, by a remark of old Legrand, who came to ask his help to pay for his wife's funeral, and who cried out to his daughter when he saw Josaph's cradle :

"I say! a kid? you ought to be happy! You were never able to do the trick before!"

Gaussin was so pleased that he paid for the funeral without asking to see the details, and kept old Legrand to breakfast.

The old driver was employed on the tramway between Paris and Versailles. Soddened with wine and apoplexy, but always vigorous and fresh-looking in his waxed leather hat heavily banded with crape—a true mute's headgear—he appeared delighted with the reception given him by his daughter's keeper, and he returned again and again to have a bite with them. His white, harlequin hair on a close-shaven and blotchy face, his lordly toss-pot airs, the respect he had for his whip, posing with it, standing it in a corner with all a mother's care, impressed the child profoundly; and the old man and he became great chums. One day, when they were finishing dinner together, the Hettemas came in unexpectedly:

"So sorry! A family party!" said the wife lackadaisically, and the word struck Jean in the face, humiliating as a blow.

His family! This foundling who lolled on the tablecloth, that free-and-easy old pirate with his pipe in the corner of his mouth, his guttural voice explaining for the hundredth time that a pennyworth of whip-cord lasted

him six months, and that for twenty years he had not changed the handle! His family! Come, that was good! They were no more his family than she was his wife, this Fanny Legrand, getting old and faded. In less than a year all this would have gone out of his life, and have become as indistinct as the chance acquaintance of travel and hotel life. But, at other times, this idea of going away with which he excused his weakness when he felt himself losing his self-respect, and being dragged down—this idea, instead of buoying him up and comforting him, caused his manifold bonds to cut more keenly into him. What a surgical operation this going away would be, not one rupture but ten; and what would not be the cost of letting go the little hand of the child, which now, in the night, clung to him? Even La Balue, the oriole, whistling and singing in a cage too small for him, but which was always to be changed, stooping like the old cardinal in his iron prison—yes, even La Balue had secured a little corner in his heart, and it would be a wrench to remove him.

The inevitable was coming for all that, and the glorious month of June—Nature's gala time—would probably be the last they

would pass together. Did that make her nervous and irritable, or was it little Josaph's education, undertaken with sudden ardour, to the great disgust of the young Morvandian who sat hours over his letters, neither looking at or pronouncing them, his face shut with a bar like the gates of a farmyard. Day by day she became more and more a prey to fits of violence and tears, although Gaussin tried to be indulgent ; but she was so abusive, and showed in her rage such spite and hatred of her lover's youth, his education, his family, and the swerving apart from one another which years would only increase—she understood so well how to touch him on the raw—that it ended in his getting angry and replying.

Only he kept his anger under control—he had the pity of a man well brought up—and there was some retorts he held back ; they were too painful and to the point. She, however, let loose with all a harlot's fury, without responsibility or shame, making a weapon of anything, watching her victim's face for the twinge of pain ; and then, suddenly falling into his arms and asking his forgiveness.

The demeanour of the Hettemas, witnesses of these quarrels which almost always exploded at table, when sitting down and uncovering

the soup, or when carving the joint, was a picture. They exchanged a look of comical bewilderment across the table. Were they going to dine, or would the leg of mutton go flying into the garden along with the dish, the gravy, and the haricot stew ?

"Now mind, no scenes!" said they, each time there was a question of dining together. They made this stipulation when they accepted an invitation to lunch in the forest, which Fanny gave them over the wall one Sunday. Oh, no! they would not quarrel to-day, it was too fine! And she ran to dress the child and fill the baskets.

All was ready, they were setting off, when the postman brought a registered letter, the signing for which delayed Gaussin. He caught them up at the entrance to the forest, and quietly said to Fanny :

"It's from uncle. He's delighted. A splendid crop, sold as it stands. He returns Déchelette's eight thousand francs, with lots of compliments and thanks for his niece."

"Yes, his niece! Gasçon fashion. The old chouse," said Fanny, who cherished no more illusions about uncles from the south-then, gleefully :

"We must invest this money."

He looked at her astounded ; he had always found her most scrupulous in money matters.

“ Invest ? But it’s not yours.”

“ Oh ! I forgot—I never told you.”

She blushed, with a look of slightly sullied frankness, an indication of the slightest departure from the truth. That good fellow, Déchelette, hearing what they were doing for Josaph, had written her that this money would help to bring up the child.

“ Still, you know, if that vexes you, we can return it to him ; he’s in Paris.”

The voices of the Hetteemas, who had discreetly gone on in front, resounded under the trees :

“ To the right or left ? ”

“ To the right, to the right, towards The Ponds ! ” cried Fanny ; then turning to her lover : “ See, now, don’t start worrying yourself with a lot of tomfoolery again ; we’ve lived together long enough, hang it ! ”

She knew that trembling pallor of the lips, that glance at the child, looking him up and down ; but this time his jealousy was but a flash in the pan. Cowardice had become habit ; he made concessions for the sake of a quiet life.

“Why should I torment myself to get to the bottom of things? If this child is hers, what more natural than that she should take it, and conceal the truth from me, after all the scenes, the cross-questionings I have forced on her? Is it not better to accept what is, and pass quietly the few months that remain to us?”

Along the forest paths he went—up hill, down, ~~dale~~—carrying the breakfast canteen in its heavy, white canvas-covered basket, uncomplaining and tired, his back as bent as an old gardener's. In front of him the mother and child walked together, Josaph in his best La Belle-Jardinière suit, looking awkward, and debarred from running; she in a bright, loose gown, with head and neck bare under a Japanese sunshade, figure filled out, languid in gait, and in her beautiful tresses a large white lock which now she took no pains to conceal.

In front of them, and lower down, were the Hettemas, hidden by a dip in the path, wearing enormous straw hats like those of the Touareg horsemen, dressed in red flannel, loaded with eatables, fishing-rods and nets. The wife, to ease her husband, was bravely carrying crosswise on her full-blown bosom

the hunting-horn, without which a walk in the forest could not respectably be taken by the draughtsman. Walking along, the couple sang :

“ I love to hear at eventide
The oar that beats the stream,
The stag, whose antlers branching wide—”

Olympe had an inexhaustible store of such gutter-poet sentimentalities. When one came to think where, in what a shameful owl-light of drawn blinds, she picked them up, and to how many men she had sung them, the complacency of the husband, who accompanied her in thirds, was monumentally grand. The sentiment of the Grenadier at Waterloo, “ they are too many,” was probably the secret of this man’s philosophical indifference.

Whilst Gaussin, thus musing, was watching the gigantic couple sink into a dip in the valley where he was following them, the crunching of wheels was heard along the path, with a peal of boisterous laughter and childish voices. Suddenly there appeared, a few paces away, a party of young girls—ribbons and hair flying—in an English dogcart drawn by a small donkey, which a girl, somewhat older

than the others, was leading by the bridle along the rough way.

It was easy to see that Jean made one of the party whose whimsical appearance—especially that of the fat lady girdled with a hunting-horn—had roused the unrestrained merriment of the young folks ; so the elder girl tried to check the children a bit. But the new Touareg had excited their laughter more than ever ; and, in passing, Gaussin, who stood aside to make way for the little cart, was greeted with a pretty, confused smile which seemed to beg his pardon, and naively express surprise that such an old gardener should have such a young and kind face.

He raised his hat timidly, and blushed—he hardly knew what shamed him. The team stopped at the top of the hill at the cross-ways, and a prattle of small voices read aloud the names on the finger-post, half rubbed out by the rain :

“ To The Ponds ; To The Royal Huntsman’s Oak ; To Velizy.”

Jean turned round to see disappear, in the green sunlit track carpeted with moss, on which the wheels rolled as on velvet, this whirlwind of fair youth, this load of happiness,

with its spring colours and peals of laughter echoing among the branches.

A tremendous blast from Hettema's horn roused him abruptly from his dream. They had camped out by the side of the pond, and were busy unpacking the provisions. From afar he saw reflected on the clear water the white cloth on the level sward, and the red flannel blazers glowing on the greenery like huntsmen's coats.

"Hurry up! you've got the lobster," cried the fat man; and then Fanny's shriller voice:

"Was it little Bouchereau who kept you?"

Jean started at the name—Bouchereau—it took him back to Castelet, to the bedside of his invalid mother.

"Yes, really," said the draughtsman, taking the basket from him. "The tallest, the one leading, is the doctor's niece—his brother's daughter, who lives with him. They stay at Velizy during the summer. She's pretty."

"Oh! pretty! is she? Brazen-faced, rather!" and Fanny, who was cutting the bread, glanced at her lover, uneasy at his far-away look.

Madame Hettema, very serious—she was

unpacking the ham—strongly censured the custom of allowing young girls to wander at will in the woods.

“ You say it is the English way, and that this girl has been brought up in London ; still, it’s not at all proper.”

“ No, but very convenient for adventures ! ”

“ Oh ! Fanny ! ”

“ I beg pardon, I forgot ; you believe in innocent girls.”

“ Come, suppose we have lunch,” said Hettema, who began to be alarmed. But she had to tell all she knew about young ladies. She had some fine stories on the subject ; convents, boarding-schools—they were nice places ! The girls left them, exhausted and faded, with a distaste for men ; not even capable of bearing children.

“ And then they are given to a pack of simpletons, like you. An innocent girl ! As if there were such ! As if, high-born or low-born, girls did not know all about it from their birth ! For myself, at twelve I had no more to learn, nor you either, eh, Olympe ? ”

“ Naturally,” said Madame Hettema, with a shrug of the shoulders ; but the fate of the lunch made her uneasy, especially when she heard Gaussin, who was getting angry declare

that "there were girls and girls, and that one could still find in families——"

"Oh! yes, families," retorted his mistress, with a look of contempt, "let us talk of them; especially about yours."

"Hold your tongue. I forbid you."

"Clodhopper!"

"Hussy! A good job this will soon end. I've not much longer to live with you."

"Go, sling your hook! It's I who'll be pleased."

These insults were cast in one another's teeth before the mischievous curiosity of the child lying full length on the grass, when a fearful trumpet blast, centupled in echoes across the pond, and on the terraced woods, suddenly drowned their quarrel.

"Have you had enough? Do you want more?" The corpulent Hetteema, red in the face, his neck swollen, could only find this way of making them hold their peace; and he waited, mouthpiece to lips, threatening them the while.

CHAPTER IX

USUALLY, their quarrels were not of long duration, and were smoothed over by a little music, or by Fanny's coaxing. This time, however, he was seriously vexed with her ; and for several days he kept the same gloomy face, and the same bitter silence, going to his drawing immediately after meals, and refusing altogether to go out with her.

It was, as it were, a sudden feeling of shame at the degrading mode of life, a fear of meeting the little cart climbing the path again, and seeing that limpid, youthful smile, of which he was constantly dreaming. Then, with the vagueness of a vanishing dream, or the fading of a fairy transformation scene, the apparition became indistinct, and lost itself in the woody distance, and Jean saw it no more. There only remained a trace of sadness, of which Fanny suspected the cause, and resolved to put things right.

"It's done," said she to him one day, quite joyfully. "I've seen Déchelette. I've returned his money. He thinks you are

quite right, and that it's more decent so ; though I should like to know why. At all events, it's done. Later, when I'm alone, he will think of the little one. Are you satisfied ? Are you still vexed with me ? ”

And she told him about her visit to the Rue de Rome, her astonishment at finding, in place of a noisy and riotous house of call for all comers, full of a dissolute mob, a quiet, homely house, guarded by the most rigorous instructions. No more galas, no more masked balls. The explanation of the change was found in these words, written in chalk by some hanger-on aggrieved at being refused admittance, on the smaller door, “ Closed for varnishing.”

“ And that's a fact, my dear. Déchelette, on arriving, went crazy over a girl he picked up at the rink, Alice Doré. He has been keeping her for a month at his place, really living with her. A very graceful, gentle little woman, a pretty enough bed-mate. They make scarcely a sound between them. I have promised that we will go and see them ; it will be a little diversion for us after hunting-horns and barcarolles. But, I say, isn't philosophy about even with its theories ?

No morrow, no living together ! Didn't I chaff him well ? ”

Jean let her take him to Déchelette's, whom he had not met since their meeting at the Madeleine. He would not have believed anyone then who told him that the time would come when he would associate without disgust with this cynical and disdainful lover of his mistress, almost to become his friend. From the first visit he was astonished how much he felt at ease, charmed by the gentleness of the man, at his hearty, childish laughter in spite of his Cossack's beard, and an evenness of temper unaffected even by the cruel liver-attacks which leadened his face and eyes.

How well one could understand the affection with which he inspired Alice Doré, with her long, soft, white hands, her flaxen beauty nothing to boast of, but set off by the brilliancy of her Flemish skin as golden as her name ; gold in her hair, the pupils of her eyes, fringing her lids, and tinging her skin even beneath the nails.

She was picked up by Déchelette from the asphalt of the rink. Amidst all the grossness and brutality of the traffic, and the clouds of smoke blown by the man, as

he names a price, in the harlot's painted face, she had been touched and surprised at his politeness. She felt herself a woman again, instead of a poor beast of pleasure ; and when he was about to pack her off in the morning, as was his custom, with a good breakfast and a few louis, her heart was so full, and she asked him so very sweetly and longingly, " Keep me a little longer," that he had no courage to refuse. Since then, half out of manly respect, half from lassitude, he had kept his door closed on this chance honeymoon, passed in the freshness and calm of his summer palace, which was so well arranged with an eye to comfort. They were very happy living thus ; she in a loving solicitude hitherto unknown to her ; he in the pleasure he gave this poor being, and her naive gratitude. He was also under the influence, without being able to account for it, and for the first time, of the absorbing charm that comes of intimacy with a woman, the unaccountable spell of life in unison, conformable to goodness and sweetness.

The studio in the Rue de Rome was a break in Gaussin's life, with its vile and mean associations—comparable only to the surroundings of the veriest menial who has

a woman in keeping. He loved to listen to this scientist with artistic tastes—a philosopher in a Persian robe as light and loose as his theories. Déchelette's descriptions of travel, sketched in as few words as possible, ran on all fours with the surroundings—the Oriental tapestries, gilded Buddhas, bronze curios and the tropical luxury of the great hall. The light fell through a lofty, glass roof—the light and shade of a woodland glade—shimmering in the graceful foliage of the bamboos, lighting up the palms slashed by the leaves of the tree ferns, and burnishing the giant fronds of the strilligias interlaced with slender, sequacious water-plants seeking their natural humid shade.

On Sunday, especially, in the deep bay-window looking on to the deserted Paris street, in summer, the rustling of leaves, and the fresh, earthy smell from the plants, was almost as much country and forest as at Chaville, with less of the promiscuity of the Hettemas and their horn. No one ever came there. Once, however, Gaussin and his mistress, arriving for dinner, heard at the door the sound of several voices. The day was drawing in, they were drinking raki in the conservatory, and the discussion seemed lively

"I think five years at Mazas, name lost, and career ruined, is quite enough to pay for an act of passion and folly. I will sign your petition, Déchelette."

"It's Caoudal," said Fanny; in a low voice, taken aback.

Some one answered with the harsh sharpness of refusal :

"I will sign nothing; I'll have nothing to do with the rogue."

"That was La Gournerie." And Fanny, hanging on her lover, whispered: "Come let's go! That is, if it will annoy you to see them."

"Why should it? Not at all!"

As a matter of fact he could scarcely tell what his feelings would be when he found himself face to face with these men. He had no wish, however, to shirk the meeting, desirous perhaps of knowing the actual strength of the jealousy which had kept alive his miserable entanglement.

"Come on!" said he, and they entered as the rosy twilight was shining on the bald pates and grizzly beards of Déchelette's friends, who were stretched on low divans round a spindly Oriental table, on which was shaking, in five or six glasses, the milky,

aniseed-flavour liqueur which Alice was pouring out.

The women kissed.

" You know these gentlemen, Gaussin ? " asked Déchelette, with a lazy movement of his rocking-chair.

Did he know them ! Two, at least, were familiar to him, seeing he had stared at their portraits in shop windows, among other celebrities, for hours together. How they had made him suffer, what hate he had for them—the detestation of having taken their leavings—a fury which urged him to pounce upon them and gnaw their faces when he met them on the street ! Fanny, however, had said wisely that he would get over that ; now they were merely faces of acquaintances, of relations almost, or of long-lost uncles found again.

" The youngster's still handsome," said Caoudal, his giant figure stretched out full length, and shading his eyes from the light with a hand-screen. " Fanny, too—let me see ? "

He raised himself on his elbow, and winked at her with the eyes of an expert :

" The face is still passable ; but the figure—you will do well to tie it up a bit. Never

mind, my girl, you can be consoled. La Gournerie is even fatter than you are ! ”

The poet bit his thin lips disdainfully. Seated, Turkish fashion, on a pile of cushions (since his visit to Algeria he pretended he could not rest otherwise), huge, pasty, his face vacuous, save for a strong forehead under a white forest of hair, and a sharp, nigger-driver expression, he met Fanny with a kind of society reserve, an exaggerated politeness, as if to give Caoudal a lesson.

Two landscape painters, with sunburnt, rustic faces, made up the party ; they, also, knew Jean's mistress, and the younger one said as he shook hands with her :

“ Déchelette has told us the story of the child ; it was very nice of you to take it, my dear.”

“ Yes,” said Caoudal to Gaussin, “ quite the correct thing—adoption. Not at all suburban.”

She began to grow embarrassed at these praises, when someone stumbled over a chair in the dark studio, and a voice asked :

“ Nobody there ? ”

“ There's Ezano,” said Déchelette.

Jean had never seen him, but he knew

the place in Fanny Legrand's life that this Bohemian rhapsodist had held. He was steady and married now, and a prominent figure at the Beaux-Arts, but Jean's memory went back to a packet of eloquent and charming letters. A little hollow-faced, shrivelled-up man came forward, walking stiffly, and shaking hands at arm's-length, keeping people in their proper place, as it were, by a kind of barrier, and an official manner. He seemed very surprised to see Fanny ; more especially to find her still pretty after so many years.

" Why, it's Sapho ! " And a slight tinge of red went to his cheeks.

The name of Sapho, which gave her back to the past, and placed her among all her old friends, was slightly embarrassing.

" Monsieur d'Armandy, who has brought her," said Déchelette quickly, to warn the new-comer. Ezano bowed, and they began to talk. Fanny was encouraged to see how her lover took things ; she was proud of him among these artists and critics—of his handsome looks, his youth—and felt very light-hearted and vivacious. Absorbed by her present passion, she scarcely gave a thought to her concubinage with these men ; nevertheless, years of cohabitation, of life in common,

which had left traces, still surviving, of habits and propensities—even the knack of making cigarettes, caught from Ezano, and his preference for “ Job ” cigarette paper and Maryland tobacco.

Jean saw, without the slightest distress, this little detail which, in old times, would have made him furious ; he felt, in consequence of this indifference, the joy of a prisoner who has filed through his chain and who knows that the least effort will suffice to set him free.

“ Well ! my poor Fanny,” said Caoudal in a chaffing voice, and pointing at the others ; “ what wrecks ! aren’t they antiquated and played out ? We two are the only ones left who can do the trick—isn’t that so ? ”

Fanny began to laugh :

“ Oh ! excuse me, colonel ”—he got the name sometimes because of his moustache—“ it’s not exactly the same thing, I’m of another generation.”

“ Caoudal always forgets that he’s a lingering antique,” said La Gournerie ; and, at a gesture from the sculptor, whom he knew he was touching on the raw :

“ Medallist in 1840,” he cried, in his strident voice ; “ that’s a date for you, my boy ! ”

Between these two old friends there rankled an aggressive, silent antipathy, never sufficient to cause a break, but which showed itself in looks and in their lightest words. This had lasted for twenty years; ever since the poet carried off the sculptor's mistress. They no longer took Fanny into account; they had both of them run against other pleasures and mortifications; but the animus lived, sinking deeper as the years rolled by.

"Look at us both now, and say frankly if it's I who am an antique!"

Squeezed in a coat which caused his muscles to stand out, Caoudal stood upright, swelling out his chest and tossing his flaming mane where not a white hair could be seen.

"Medallist in 1840, fifty-eight in three months' time. Well, what does that prove? Is it age that makes a man old? It's only at the Comedie-Francaise and the Conservatoire that men are spluttering at sixty, with shaky head, shuffling feet, bent back, legs giving way under them, and physically impotent. Sixty, hang it all! I shall walk as firmly as at thirty, because I take care of myself; and the women run after one still; provided the heart remains young, it warms and excites the whole carcass."

"Do you believe that?" said La Gournerie, looking at Fanny and chuckling. Then Déchelette, with his open smile:

"And yet you are always preaching that there's nothing like youth—you are continually harping on it."

"It's my little Cousinard who has made me change my opinion. Cousinard, my new model. Eighteen years old, plump, with dimples all over her—a Clodion. Such a nice girl, one of the people—her mother sells poultry in the market. She comes out with such stupid things that one could kiss her for them. The other day in the studio she found one of Dejoie's novels, and looking at the title 'Therese,' threw it down with a pretty pout. 'If that had been called "Poor Therese," I would have read it all night.' I'm very much gone on her, I can tell you."

"So you've got a woman in keeping again! Six months hence there will be another rupture, tears with fisticuffs, distaste for work, shooting matches."

Caoudal's face clouded.

"It's true nothing lasts. You take them; you leave them."

"Then why take them in keeping?"

"Well, what about yourself? Do you

think you're going to spend your life with your Flemish girl ? ”

“ Oh, we—we've not gone into permanent keeping ; have we, Alice ? ”

“ Certainly not,” was replied in a gentle and absent voice ; the young girl had mounted a chair, and was gathering some wistaria and green leaves for the table decorations.

Déchelette continued : “ There will be no rupture between us, scarcely a leave-taking. We agreed to live together for two months ; on the last day we shall part, without despair and without surprise. I return to Ispahan—I've just engaged my sleeping berth—and Alice will return to her little room in the Rue Labruyere, which she has kept on.”

“ On the third floor, very convenient for jumping out of the window ! ”

In saying this, the young girl smiled, rosy and bright in the fading day, a heavy bunch of mauve blossoms in her hand ; but the stress on her words was so thoughtful and grave that no one answered her. The wind freshened ; the houses opposite seemed higher.

“ Come, let us seat ourselves at table ! ” cried the colonel. “ Let us talk of something sportive.”

“ Yes, that’s it, *gaudeamus igitur*, let us enjoy ourselves whilst we are young. Is it not so, Caoudal ? ” said La Gournerie, with an insincere laugh.

Some days after, Jean was passing through the Rue de Rome and found the studio closed, the great canvas curtain let down over the glass, a melancholy silence reigning from cellar to terraced roof. Déchelette had gone at the time agreed ; the arrangement had expired. And he thought :

“ It is a fine thing to do as one wishes in life, and govern one’s reason and heart. Shall I ever have the courage ? ”

A hand was placed on his shoulder :

“ Good-morning, Gaussin.”

Déchelette looking fatigued and yellower, and fuller of frowns than usual, explained to him that he could not get away yet, being detained in Paris by several matters, that he was living at the Grand Hotel—the studio gave him the horrors since that terrible affair——

“ What affair ? ”

“ I forgot—you don’t know. Alice is dead.

She killed herself. Just wait whilst I see if there are any letters."

He came back almost immediately. As his trembling fingers removed the newspaper wrappers, he spoke in a hollow voice, like a somnambulist, without looking at Gaussin who walked by his side :

" Yes, dead ! Jumped out of the window, as she said that evening when you were there. How could I help it ? I did not know ; I could not suspect. On the day I had to go she said to me quietly : ' Take me with you, Déchelette, do not leave me alone. I cannot now live without you.' I pooh-poohed the idea. Fancy me with a woman out there among the Kurds ! The deserts, the fever, the nights in camp ! At dinner she urged again : ' I shall not be in your way ; you will see how good I shall be.' Then, seeing that she vexed me, she abandoned the subject. Afterwards we went to the Varieties, had a private box—it had all been arranged beforehand. She appeared satisfied, held my hand all the time, and murmured : ' I am happy.' As I was leaving during the night, I drove her home ; but we were both of us sad and did not speak. She did not even thank me for a little packet which I slipped into her

pocket—sufficient to enable her to live quietly for a year or two. Arrived at the Rue Labruyere, she asked me to come up. I would not. 'I beg you—only to the door.' But there I stuck; I would not go in. My berth was engaged, my bag packed; and, besides, I had said too often that I was going. As I went downstairs, my heart rather heavy, I heard her call out to me something like, 'quicker than you,' but I only understood it when I got down to the street—Oh!——"

He stopped, his eyes on the ground, before the horrible vision which the pavement now presented to him, at every step an inert, black, groaning mass.

"She died two hours afterwards without a word, without a complaint; looking straight at me with her golden eyes: Did she suffer? Did she recognise me? We had put her on the bed, all dressed, a large lace shawl on one side of her head to hide the wound in her skull. Very pale, with a little blood on the temple, she was still pretty, and so sweet! But as I bent over her to wipe away the drop of blood, which kept oozing from the wound, her expression seemed to me to become indignant and terrible. A silent curse which the poor girl was casting upon me! After all,

what was there to hinder me from staying a few days longer, or from taking her with me, eager as she was, and little as she would have been in the way? Nothing save pride, a stubbornness in keeping my given word. Well, I did not yield! and she is dead, dead for my sake who loved her, anyhow."

He grew excited, and his voice ran high, followed by the astonishment of the people he elbowed in going down the Rue d'Amsterdam. Gaussin's thoughts on passing his old home, and noticing its balcony and verandah, reverted to Fanny and their own story, and he felt himself shudder as Déchelette continued :

"I followed her to Montparnasse cemetery, without friends, without relations. I wished to be the only one to think of her. And since then, I have stayed on, always thinking of the same thing, unable to get away with this dominant idea on my mind, shunning the house where I passed two very happy months with her. I live out of doors; I go about; I try to distract myself, and escape from the dead girl's eye which accuses me of the oozing blood."

He stopped himself, filled with remorse, two great tears glistening down his little

fat nose, looking so good-natured and so fond of life ; he said :

“ See here, my friend ; all said and done, I’m not wicked. It is not unaccountable that I should have done this thing.”

Jean tried to console him, putting it down to luck—bad luck ; but Déchelette repeated, shaking his head, and his teeth clenched :

“ No, no, I shall never forgive myself. I should like to punish myself.”

This craving for expiation did not cease to haunt him ; he spoke of it to all his friends, to Gaussin, whom he would meet at the office after hours.

“ You must go away, Déchelette. Travel, work—they will take you out of yourself,” Caoudal and the others kept saying, a little afraid of this fixed idea, a tenacious wish to get them to say he was not wicked. Finally, one evening, whether he wished to see the studio again before he left, or whether drawn by a determination to put an end to the trouble he had brought on himself there, he entered his house again. In the morning some labourers, going along the street on their way to work, picked him up on the pavement in front of his door, his skull split, killed by the same kind of suicide as the woman, with

the same terrors, the same despair shattering the reason, and causing him to fling himself into the street.

A crowd was pressing through the dimly-lighted studio—artists, models, actresses, all the dancers, all the guests at the last balls. There was a sound of shuffling feet, of whispering, the murmuring of a lying-in-state beneath the short flames of the wax candles. The crowd were looking through the creepers and foliage at the body lying exposed full length in golden-flowered, silk wrappings, a turban on the head to conceal a frightful gash, the white hands in front speaking of surrender, of the last debt paid—at rest on the low divan, overshadowed by wistarias, where Gaussin and his mistress first met on the night of the ball !

CHAPTER X

PEOPLE die then, sometimes, of these ruptures ! Now, when they quarrelled, Jean dared no longer speak of his going ; he cried no more, exasperated :

“ Happily this will soon end.”

She would only have had to answer :

“ Very well, go ; I shall kill myself ; I shall do the same as the other.”

He fancied, also, he could read this threat in her melancholy looks ; and the songs she sang in her quiet moments troubled him greatly.

He had already passed the examination which ends the probationary period for consular attachés ; and, being high in the list, he was to get one of the first vacancies. It was thus only an affair of weeks, even of days ! And around them, in this closing of the season and the gradually shortening days, everything else was hurrying towards the changes of winter. One morning, Fanny, opening the window in the first mist, cried :

“ Why, the swallows have gone.”

One after another the summer cottages closed their shutters; furniture vans and great country omnibuses, loaded with packages, plumes of green plants nodding on top, crowded the Versailles road; whilst the fallen leaves were caught up in eddies to be scattered like flying clouds in a windy sky; and ricks stood in bare fields. Behind was the orchard, now leafless and appearing smaller therefrom; and the closed cottages, and the drying-houses of the laundries, with their red-tile roofs, massed themselves in the dreary landscape. On the other side of the house, the now exposed railway stretched its black track along the grey-tinted woods.

What cruelty it was to leave her there alone amid all this dejection! He felt his heart soften in advance; he would never have the courage to say good-bye. She relied upon this, was waiting for it when the crisis came, and till then was quite content, saying nothing, faithful to her promise not to hinder his departure, which had always been foreseen and agreed upon. One day he came back with the news:

“I am gazetted.”

“Ah! where to?”

She questioned him indifferently, but her

bloodless lips and eyes, and the acute twitching all over her face made him end her suspense quickly:

"No, no, not yet. I have stood aside for Hedouin that will give us six months at least."

Then came a breaking loose of tears, laughter and passionate kisses.

"Thanks! thanks! How happy I shall make your life now! It was that, you see, that made me naughty—the idea of your leaving me."

She would now be better able to prepare herself for it; she could become resigned, little by little. Besides, in six months' time it would no longer be autumn to give the finishing stroke to her sadness.

She kept her word. No more hysterics, no more quarrels; and even to avoid the soreness caused by the boy, she made up her mind to put him to school at Versailles. He only got leave on Sunday, and if the new powers that were did not soften at once his rebel and savage nature, they taught him, at least, to be hypocritical. They lived quietly, the dinners with the Hettemas were enjoyed without storms, and the piano was again resorted to for their favourite song.

But, inwardly, Jean was more uneasy, more perplexed than ever. He asked himself where his weakness was leading him. He sometimes thought of giving up the consular service and entering the office. That would mean Paris, and his life with Fanny indefinitely prolonged. But it would also mean the dream of his youth abandoned, the despair of his people, and a certain rupture with his father, who would never forgive him for sacrificing his career, especially when he learnt the reason.

And for whom? For a faded creature now advanced in years, whom he no longer loved—his complacency in the presence of her lovers proved that. What witchcraft was fast holding him to her?

Entering the train one morning in the last days of October, a young girl's eyes meeting his own brought to mind all at once the scene in the wood, the radiant beauty of the woman-child, the memory of which had pursued him for months. She wore the same light dress that the sun had streaked so prettily under the branches, but covered by a large travelling-cloak. In the carriage, the books, a small bag and a bunch of great reeds and autumn flowers, betokened a return to

Paris at the end of the country season. She, too, had recognised him, with a half-smile lurking in her eyes, as limpid as spring-water ; and there was, for a moment, the same sympathy of thought between them.

“ How is your mother, Monsieur d’Armandy ? ” asked suddenly old Bouchereau, whom Jean, somewhat dazzled, had not seen at first, buried in his corner, reading, his pale face bent down.

Jean gave his latest news, very much gratified that he and his were remembered ; and he was still more affected when the young girl asked after the little twins, who had written her uncle such a sweet letter, to thank him for the care he had taken of their mother. She knew them then ? It filled him with joy ; then—he seemed to be extremely sensitive that morning—he grew sad at once when told that they were returning to Paris, as Bouchereau’s term at the School of Medicine was commencing. There would be no chance of seeing her again. The fields flying past the windows, just now enchanting,

seemed to him cheerless, and lying in the shadow of an eclipse.

There was a prolonged whistle ; the train had arrived. He bowed and left them, but they met again, leaving the station. Bouchereau, in the jostling of the crowd, told him that from Thursday next he would be at home in the Place Vendome, if he felt inclined for a cup of tea. She gave her arm to her uncle, and Jean felt that it was she who had invited him without speaking a word.

Having decided several times that he would go and see the Bouchereaus, then that he would not—what was the good of inflicting on himself vain regrets ?—he ultimately announced at home, nevertheless, that there would shortly be a swell gathering at the Ministry, to which he was expected to go. Fanny looked over his dress suit, and ironed his white ties ; but, after all, on the Thursday evening he suddenly had not the least desire to go. His mistress persuaded him that he must not shirk this duty function, and reproached herself with taking up too much of his time, selfishly keeping him tied to her apron strings. This finally decided him ; and she playfully finished dressing him, re-tying his cravat, smoothing his hair, laughing

because her fingers smelt of the cigarette, which she was taking continually from her mouth to rest it on the chimney-piece, saying it would make his partners sniff. Seeing her so lively and good-tempered, he was sorry he had lied to her, and would willingly have stayed with her at the fireside, if Fanny had not compelled him.

"I insist; you really must," and she pushed him tenderly out into the night on the dark road.

It was late when he returned; she was asleep, and the light from the lamp falling on the tired sleeper, brought back to his mind a similar scene, already three years ago, after the terrible revelations that had been made to him. How faint-hearted he had been then! How demented he must have been to allow what should have set him free to rivet his fetters still more closely about him! Disgust seized hold of him. The room, the bed, the woman, all were equally repulsive; he took the light and carried it softly into the next room. He wished so much to be

alone, to dream over what had occurred.
Oh ! nothing, next to nothing——

He loved.

There is in certain words, as we ordinarily use them, a latent force which all at once opens them up, and explains their most deep-rooted meaning ; then the word coils up again, resumes its every-day usage, and becomes conventional, mechanical, worn out. " Love " is one of these words ; those who have once learnt its full meaning will understand the delicious anguish by which Jean had been torn for the last hour, without being very clear, at first, what was the matter with him.

Yonder, in the Place Vendome, in that corner of the drawing-room where they sat chatting to one another, he had been filled with the greatest ecstasy of a sweet charm surrounding him. It was only on leaving, the door closed on him, that he had been seized with a mad delight, followed by exhaustion—he thought all his veins had burst.

“ Good heavens ! What is the matter with me ? ”

As he walked back, the Paris he traversed seemed to him strange, fairy-like, larger, radiant. At the hour when the night-hawks are let loose and prow! about, when human slime from the sewers comes to the surface, preens itself for sale, swarming under the yellow gas, he—the lover of Sapho, keen for every debauchery—saw Paris as a young girl sees it returning from a ball, swathed in white, her head full of waltz tunes which she carols to the stars—a chaste Paris, bathed in moonlight in which virgin souls blossom—that was the Paris he saw ! All at once, as he went up the broad staircase at the railway station, on the point of starting for his wretched home, he was surprised to hear himself say aloud :

“ Why, I love her, I love her.”

And it was thus he learnt it.

“ Are you there, Jean ? Whatever are you doing ? ”

Fanny woke with a start, frightened at not feeling him beside her. He must go and kiss her, lie, talk of the ball at the Ministry,

of the pretty dresses, and say with whom he danced ; but to escape the questionings, and above all the kisses which he now dreaded, impregnated as he was with memories of the other, he pretends to have a pressure of work—drawings for Hetteema.

“ But there is no fire ; you will be cold.”

“ No, I shan’t.”

“ Well, leave the door open, so that at least, I can see your lamp.”

He must act the lie to the end; prepare the table and the diagrams ; then, seated motionless, holding his breath, he thinks, and recalls everything ; and, to fix his dream, writes a long letter to Césaire, telling him all about it. Outside, the while, the night wind sways the creaking branches, bare of rustling leaves, and the rumbling trains follow one after the other ; even La Balue, restless in the light, stirs in his little cage, hopping from perch to perch with timid cries.

He told all : the meeting in the wood, the railway carriage, his strange feelings on entering Bouchereau’s rooms so dreary and tragic on the day of the consultation, with the furtive whisperings in the door-

ways, and the sad glances from chair to chair, but which that evening were thrown open in the long illuminated suite, animated and full of life. Bouchereau himself had lost his set expression ; and instead of a stern, searching and disquieting glance from under the bushy eyebrows, he wore the quiet fatherly expression of a genial old man who likes to see others enjoy themselves in his house.

“ Suddenly she came towards me ; then I saw no more. Her name is Irene ; she is pretty, looks good-natured, has an English-woman’s auburn hair, a child’s mouth, always ready to laugh. Not the spiritless, irritating laugh of so many women ; but the full-souled laugh of youth and happiness. She was born in London, but her father was French. She has no accent whatever, only a charming way of pronouncing certain words, of saying ‘uncle,’ which each time causes old Bouchereau’s eyes to beam with love. He adopted her to relieve his brother’s family, which is numerous, and to replace his eldest sister, who was married two years ago to his chief assistant. But she—well, doctors are not at all to her mind. She amused me very much with some nonsense about a young

physician who insisted, above all things, on a formal and solemn engagement from his betrothed to bequeath their bodies to the Anthropological Society ! She is a bird of passage. She loves ships and the sea ; the sight of a vessel heading for open water makes her quite excited. She told me this frankly, as a comrade ; she is quite English in deportment, in spite of her Parisian grace ; and I listened, enraptured at her voice, her laugh, at the similarity of our tastes, with an inward certainty that my life's happiness was there, at my side, and that I had only to take it, to carry it off, far, far off, wherever my adventurous career might lead me——”

“ Come to bed, dear.”

He starts, stops, instinctively hides the letter he is writing.

“ Soon. Go to sleep, go to sleep.”

He speaks angrily to her ; and, leaning back to listen, hears the regular breathing of sleep return to the woman ; they are very near one another, and yet so far apart !

—Whatever happens, this meeting, this

love, will be my deliverance. You know my life ; you understand, without my ever having spoken of it, that it is the same as before, that I could not get free of her. But you do not know that I was ready to sacrifice fortune, future—everything—to this fatal connection which was dragging me deeper into the depths every day. Now, I have found the motive, the fulcrum I needed ; and, to give my weakness no chance, I have sworn not to return yonder except I am free and separated from my present life. To-morrow I go——”

It was neither the morrow, nor the next day. There must be an excuse for parting, a pretext or the climax of a quarrel for one to say : “ I go, never to return ” ; and Fanny was as gentle and as full of spirits as in the first dreamy days of their life together.

Should he write “ it is all over ” without more ado ? It was not likely this violent woman would let him go like that ; she would pursue him ; she would turn upon him at his hotel, or at the office. No, better

to have it out face to face, and to convince her that the separation was irrevocable and definite ; and, without pity or anger, explain the reasons.

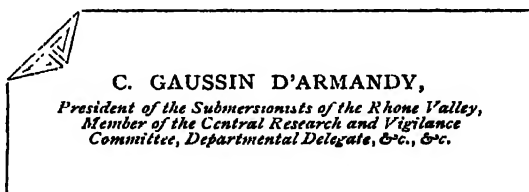
But with these reflections he also recalled, with dread, the suicide of Alice Doré. In front of their house, on the other side of the road, a lane ran down to the railway, closed by a gate ; the neighbours went that way when pressed for time, following the rails to the station. In imagination the south countryman saw his mistress, after the parting scene, rushing out across the road, down the lane, and throw herself under the wheels of the train in which he was going away from her. This fear obsessed him to such a point that the mere thought of the swinging gate between the two ivy-covered walls made him shrink from an explanation.

If he had only had a friend, someone to look after her in the first crisis ; but, as buried as marmots, they knew no one. It was not to the Hettemas, huge as they were, greasy and deluged in fat, and further bestialised by the approach of their Esquimaux's hibernation, that the unfortunate woman could look for help in her despair and abandonment.

However, a speedy break was imperative. In spite of this self-imposed promise Jean had gone back two or three times to the Place Vendome, smitten more deeply each time. He had said nothing as yet ; but old Bouchereau received him with open arms ; and Irene, notwithstanding a certain reserve, was tender and indulgent, as if timidly expecting an avowal. • All this warned him against delay ; besides which, there was the humiliation of lying, of making excuses to Fanny, and the feeling of sacrilege he experienced in going warm from Sapho's kisses to a modest, timorous wooing.

CHAPTER XI

STILL puzzled how best to act, he found on his table at the office a card left by a gentleman who had already been twice that morning, so the door-keeper, somewhat in awe at the name, informed him :



Uncle Césaire in Paris ! Le Fénat a delegate member of a Vigilance Committee ! His astonishment was not worn off when his uncle appeared, still brown as a fir-apple, his eyes frolicsome, a laugh at the corner of his temples and his leaguer's beard. Instead, however, of the everlasting fustian jacket, a new frock coat, buttoned up, gave the little man an importance that was verily presidential.

What brought him to Paris ? The purchase

of an elevator for his new vineyards—he pronounced the word “elevator” with an emphasis which increased his importance in his own eyes—and also to order his own bust which his colleagues had asked him for, to adorn the council room.

“You have noticed,” he added modestly, “that they have made me president. My idea of submersion will revolutionise the South. Only fancy! it is Le Fénat who is going to save the vines of France! Nothing like eccentric ideas, you see!”

But the principal object of his journey was the rupture with Fanny. He understood the affair dragged, so he had come to put the finishing stroke.

“I’ll manage it for you, see if I don’t! When Courbebaisse broke his off to get married——”

Before commencing his rigmarole, he paused, and unbuttoning his coat, pulled out a small but bulky pocket-book:

“To begin with, take this—yes! money—smart money.”

He mistook his nephew’s gesture, thinking he refused it from delicacy.

“Take it! take it! I am proud I am able to repay the son a little of what the father did for me. Besides, Divonne wishes.

it thus. She knows all about the matter, and is very glad, indeed, you are thinking of marrying, and shaking off your old leech."

Coming from Césaire, after the service his mistress had rendered him, Jean thought "old leech" was a little unjust; and somewhat bitterly, he answered:

"Put your pocket-book away, uncle; you know better than anyone else how little Fanny cares for money."

"Yes, she was a good girl,"—this as if he were delivering a funeral oration, blinking his crow's feet, and adding:

"Well, take care of the money, at all events. With the temptation of Paris, I would rather see it in your hands than in mine; besides, it is as necessary in ruptures as in duels."

Whereupon he rose, and declared that he was dying of hunger; they could much better discuss this important question at breakfast, fork in hand. Always the same bantering levity of the South in dealing with women!

"Between ourselves, my boy"—they were at table in a restaurant in the Rue de Bour-

gogne ; the uncle, napkin-chinned, was warming to his work, but Jean could only pick his food ; he was too upset to eat.

"I think you take things too seriously. I very well know that the first step is awkward and bothersome to explain ; but if you feel it's too much for you, say nothing, follow Courbebaïsse's example. Up to the morning of his marriage la Mornas knew nothing. In the evening, when he left his betrothed's house, he fetched the singer from the music-hall, and took her home. You may tell me that it was not the right thing, not very loyal. But when one dislikes a scene, especially with such violent women as Paola Mornas ? This fine, strapping fellow had trembled for nearly eighteen years before the little blackamoor. To get rid of her he had to be tricky and steal a march on her."

This was how it was done :

The day before the marriage was the 15th of August, a public holiday, and Césaire suggested to the little dear that they should have a day's fishing in the Yvette. Courbebaïsse would join them at dinner ; and they would all three return the next evening when Paris was free of the stench of dust, rockets and lamp oil. That was all right.

"You can imagine us, stretched on the grassy slope of the little stream, all dancing and bright, its low banks bordering the greenest of fields and the leafiest of willows."

After fishing, a dip. It was not the first time Paola and he had bathed together—as comrades! But to-day little Mornas, arms and legs naked, her Maugraubin's body outlined by the wet, clinging costume—perhaps, too, an idea that Courbebaisse had given him full leave :

"Ah, the poacher!" She turned round, and looking him straight in the face :

"Now, Césaire, that's enough, you know."

He desisted, afraid he might spoil his chance, and said to himself :

"We'll wait till after dinner."

The dinner on the wooden balcony of the inn, between the two flags hoisted by the landlord in honour of the 15th of August, was jolly enough. It was hot, the hay smelt sweetly, and they heard the drums, the crackers and the band of the choral society marching through the streets.

"Isn't Courbebaisse provoking not to come till to-morrow?" said la Mornas, stretching her arms, and looking champagne-in-the-eyes. "I should like to have some fun to-night."

“ And I, too ! ”

He was by her side, leaning over the railing of the balcony still hot from the sun ; and, slyly to try her, whether approachable or not, he passed his arm round her waist :

“ Oh, Paola, Paola ! ”

This time she was not angry ; the singer began to laugh, but so loudly, and heartily, that he ended by laughing as well. Another attempt in the evening when they got back from the fair, where they had danced and played for macaroons, was repulsed in the same way ; and, their bedrooms adjoining, she sang through the partition : “ You’re too little, you’re too little,” with all sorts of uncomplimentary comparisons between himself and Courbebaisse. He could hardly refrain from retorting, and calling her Widow Mornas ; but it was too soon yet. The next morning, when sitting down to a good breakfast, Paola fidgeting and worried at last at her lover not turning up, he took out his watch with a certain satisfaction, and said solemnly :

“ Twelve o’clock ; it’s over.”

“ What’s over ? ”

“ He is married.”

“ Who ? ”

“ Courbebaisse.”

Whack !

“ Ah ! my boy, what a bang in the jaw ! In all my petticoat hunting I never got the like. And then, all at once, she must be off. But there was no train till four o'clock. All this time the traitor was scorching away towards Italy, with his wife. Then, in her rage, she plants me with blows and scratches, overwhelms me—that was my chance ! I had locked the door—then she begins on the crockery, and ends by going into agonising hysterics. At five o'clock she is laid on her bed, and they watch her, whilst I, all'scratched as if I had come through a bramble thicket, run to fetch the doctor from Orsay. In these matters, as in a duel, it is always best to have a doctor present. You may imagine me on the road, fasting, and in a broiling sun ! It was dark when I brought him back. All at once, when nearing the inn, there is the murmur of a crowd ; a mob had assembled under the window. Ah, heavens ! has she committed suicide ? Or killed someone ? With la Mornas that was more likely. I hurry along, and what do I see ? The balcony hung with Venetian lanterns, and the singer stands there, consoled and superb, wrapped in one of the flags, in the midst of the imperial fete,

bawling the Marseillaise over the heads of the acclaiming people !

" That, my boy, is the way Courbebaisse's entanglement was ended. I will not say that it was over all at once. After ten years' imprisonment one must always reckon on a little supervision. Still, I got the brunt of it ; and I will stand as much of the racket for you, if you like." .

" But, uncle, she is not the same kind of woman ! "

" Get out ! " said Césaire, opening a box of cigars, and holding them up to his ear to see if they were dry, " you are not the first who has left her."

" That's right enough."

This idea caused Jean to feel more at ease ; a few months before it would have broken his heart. As a matter of fact his uncle's story had somewhat reassured him ; but what he could not think of complacently was a double life for months to come, the hypocrisy of keeping one woman while courting another. He could never agree to that, and he had delayed too long already.

" Then what are you going to do ? "

Whilst the young man floundered in this uncertainty, the member of the Vigilance

Committee stroked his beard, and practised smiles, effects and poses of the head ; then he asked carelessly :

“ Does he live far from here ? ”

“ Who ? ”

“ Why, Caoudal, the artist you spoke to me about, in regard to my bust. We might go and ascertain his figure while we are together.”

Caoudal, though famous, and prodigal of money, still occupied the studio in the Rue d'Assas where success had first come to him. Césaire, as they went along, asked about his reputation as an artist ; he did not mind paying the price, but the committee wanted something first-class.

“ You need not be uneasy on that score, uncle, if Caoudal accepts the commission.”

Then he ran over the sculptor's titles—Member of the Institute, Commander of the Legion of Honour, and a crowd of foreign orders. Le Fénat opened wide his eyes.

“ And you are friends ? ”

“ Very good friends.”

“ Well ! well—Paris ! Only fancy what swell acquaintances one makes there.”

Nevertheless, Gaussin would have felt some shame had he to confess that Caoudal was

one of Fanny's old lovers, and that it was through her he knew him. But one might have said that Césaire had guessed it :

"He is the author of the Sapho which we have at Castelet ? Then he knows your mistress, and might help you in breaking away from her. The Institute, the Legion of Honour, all these things have influence with a woman."

Jean made no reply, perhaps wondering how the influence of the first lover could be utilised.

His uncle continued, with a hearty laugh :

"By-the-bye, you know the bronze is no longer in your father's room ? When Divonne knew—when I had the bad luck to let out that it represented your mistress, she would no longer have it there. The consul's whims, and his objection to the least change, made it no easy matter ; especially to prevent him from suspecting the reason. Oh, the women ! She manœuvred so well that Monsieur Thiers now presides on your father's chimney-piece, and poor Sapho, covered with dust, lies in the ' Windy Chamber,' with the old andirons and dilapidated furniture ; she even got knocked about in moving ; her chignon is broken, and the lyre is smashed—

Divonne's spite, no doubt, caused that mischance ! ”

They arrived at the Rue d'Assas. When he saw the modest work-a-day appearance of this city of artists—studios with numbered coach-house doors opening on to the two sides of a long yard, at the end of which were the commonplace buildings of a Communal school, with a perpetual hum of reading,—the president of the Submersionists was concerned anew as to the talents of a man so meanly lodged ; but no sooner had he entered Caoudal's quarters than he knew what to expect.

“ Not for a hundred thousand francs, not for a million ? ” roared the sculptor at Gaussin's first word ; and, gradually raising his great body from the divan where he was stretched in studio disorder and ease :

“ A bust ! well, yes ! But look there at that plaster smashed into a thousand pieces ; it was my model for the next Salon which I have just broken up with a mallet. That's what I'm going to do about sculpture, and however attractive be the physog of Monsieur——”

“ Gaussin d'Armandy, President——”

Uncle Césaire was rolling off his titles,

but there were too many of them. Caoudal interrupted him, and turning towards the young man :

“ You are staring at me, Gaussin. You find me aged ? ”

Without doubt he looked his years in this light, falling from above on the scars, the hollows and bruises of a jaded high-liver's face, his lion's mane showing shabby places like a threadworn carpet, his cheeks hanging and flabby, and his moustache, which he no longer troubled to curl or dye, the colour of tarnished gilt. What was the good ? Cousinard, the little model, had just bolted.

“ Yes, my dear fellow, with my moulder, a savage, a brute, but—twenty years old ! ”

Furious and sarcastic, he strode the studio at a great pace, kicking aside a stool that blocked his way. All at once he paused before a copper-wrought mirror above the divan, and looked at himself with a hideous, grimace :

“ I hope I'm ugly enough, wreck enough, as flabby as the dewlap of an old cow ! ”

He grasped his neck with his hand, and then, like an old beau looking ahead, and

commiserating himself, in a voice of comic lamentation

"Fancy, I shall be regretting even this, next year!"

Uncle Césaire was astounded. This an Academician, letting his tongue wag, and telling his vulgar intrigues. There were lack-wits everywhere, then, even at the Institute; and his admiration for the great man grew less as he sympathised with his weaknesses.

"How is Fanny? Are you still at Chaville?" asked Caoudal, suddenly quieting down and coming to sit at Gaussin's side, tapping him familiarly on the shoulder.

"Ah, poor Fanny, we have not much longer to live together now!"

"You are going away?"

"Yes, soon; and I am going to be married first. I must leave her."

The sculptor laughed ferociously

"Bravo! I am glad. Avenge us, my boy, avenge us on the hussies. Cast them off, deceive them, let them weep, the worthless jades. You will never do them as much harm as they have worked for others."

Uncle Césaire was in high glee.

"You see, the gentleman does not take things so tragically. Would you believe it?"

What prevents this simple youth leaving her is a fear that she will kill herself ! ”

Jean admitted, very simply, that Alice Doré's suicide had made an impression on him.

“ But that is a totally ‘different thing,’ ” said Caoudal eagerly. “ She was a seek-sorrow, a sappy moester, a poor gutless doll. Déchelette was wrong in thinking that he was the cause of her death ; she killed herself because she was sick and tired of life. But Sapho, ha ! ha !—she take her own life ! She has too much lust for love, and will burn down to the end, down to the socket. She resembles young stage-lovers, who commence as such, never change their parts, and who end as such, toothless and hairless. Look at me ! Am I going to kill myself ? I know I'm a beauty to be cut up ; I know full well that, this one gone, I shall take another, and so on to the end. O, as she is no longer young, it will be more difficult.”

The uncle continued to chuckle :

“ Is that enough to satisfy you, eh ? ”

Jean said nothing, but his scruples were overcome and his resolutions taken. They were leaving when the sculptor called them back to show a photograph, picked up from

the dust on the table, which he was wiping with his sleeve.

“See, there she is! Isn’t she pretty—the hussy—pretty enough to go on one’s knees to? See, what legs, and what a throat!”

It was terrible to contrast the longing eyes, and voice full of passion, with the senile trembling of the spatulous fingers holding the smiling portrait of the little model, padded all over with dimpled charms!

CHAPTER XII

“ Is it you ? How soon you’re back ! ”

She came from the end of the garden, her skirt full of windfall apples. She ran quickly up the steps, a trifle uneasy at her lover’s embarrassed and stubborn look.

“ What can be the matter ? ”

“ Nothing, nothing, it’s the weather, the sun. I thought we would take advantage of the last fine day to have a turn in the forest, both of us. Will you come ? ”

There was one exclamation—an expression from the gutter which she used whenever she was pleased—“ Here’s luck ! ” It was more than a month since they had been out, having been kept in the house by November rains and storms. The country was not always enjoyable ; as well live in the ark with Noah’s beasts. She had some orders to give in the kitchen as the Hettemas were coming to dinner ; and, while he waited outside on the Pave des Gardes, Jean turned his eyes towards the little house beaming on the soft light of late summer, and on the

broad, mossy-flagged, country road with that memory-binding gaze which we bestow on a place when about to quit it for ever.

Through the wide-open window of the dining-room came the warbling of the oriole, and the sound of Fanny's orders to the woman :

" Now, don't forget, dinner for half-past six. Serve the guinea-fowl first. Ah ! I must put out the table linen."

Her voice rang clear and happy amidst the sounds of kitchen work and the note of the bird singing himself hoarse in the sun. He, knowing that their life together would not last more than two hours longer, was cut to the heart by these festive preparations.

He had a good mind to go in and tell her all, there and then, at one blow ; but he was afraid of her screams, of the terrible scene which would be heard all over the neighbourhood, and of a scandal which would raise all Chaville. He knew that, once let loose, nothing would check her, so he kept to his idea of taking her into the forest.

" Here I am ; I'm ready."

She took his arm playfully, with a warning to speak low and walk quickly past their

neighbour's house, for fear Olympe would want to come with them, and thus spoil their walk. She did not feel safe until, having cleared the road and railway bridge, they turned to the left into the woods,

The day was mild and lovely. The sun, sifting through a silvery floating haze, bathed the whole atmosphere, hugging the copses in which a few trees were not yet quite denuded of their golden autumn leaves, with magpies' nests and clumps of green mistletoe in the top branches ; while a continuous, rasping, file-like cry of a bird, and the tappings of beaks on the trees answered the woodman's axe.

They walked slowly, their footprints marked on the ground softened by the autumnal rains. She was hot from having to start so hurriedly, cheeks flushed and eyes brilliant. She stopped to take off the large blond-lace shawl, a present from Rosa, which she had thrown over her head in starting, a delicate and costly relic of past splendours. He had known the dress she wore for the last three years, a shabby black silk, much worn under the arms and at the waist ; and when she lifted it, as she walked in front, to avoid a puddle, he noticed she was down at the heels. "

With what a good heart had she endured this comparative poverty, without regret, without complaint ; concerned for him, for his well-being, and never happier than when clinging to him with hands clasped on his arm. Jean wondered to himself, as he looked at her rejuvenated by this springtime of sunshine and love, what could be the depth of vigour in such a creature, what marvellous faculty of forgetfulness and condonation, that she could preserve so much gaiety and light-heartedness after a life of passion, crosses and tears, all stamped on her face, but vanishing with the slightest breath of pleasure.

“ It’s the right kind ; I tell you it’s a good one.”

She crept into the wood, up to her knees in dead leaves. Coming back, her hair down, rumpled by the brambles, she showed him the signs which mark an edible mushroom from a toadstool.

“ You see, it’s all right.” And she was delighted.

He was not listening to her ; absent minded, he asked himself :

“ Is this the moment ? Shall I ? ”

He seemed unable to bring his courage to sticking-point ; she was laughing too

merrily, or the spot was not favourable, and he drew her on and on, like an assassin who premeditates his blow.

He was about to make the plunge when, at a turn in the path, someone appeared to disturb them ; it was Hochecorne, the forester, whom they met occasionally. The poor devil had lost, one after another, in the little hut allowed him by the State on the edge of the pond, his two children and then his wife, all of the same fatal fever. When the first died, the doctor declared the situation unhealthy, too near the water and its emanations ; but, in spite of certificates and recommendations, he had been left there two, three years, time enough to see all his family die, with the exception of a little girl whom he had at last brought to live in a new house on the edge of the wood.

Hochecorne's face was of the stubborn Breton type, light eyes, full of courage, and a retreating forehead beneath his uniform cap—a true type of fidelity, and unflinching obedience to orders. The strap of his gun was slung over one shoulder, and on the other was the head of his sleeping child whom he was carrying.

“ How is she ? ” asked Fanny, smiling.

at the little girl, four years of age, but pale and worn with fever, who woke up and opened her large eyes rimmed with red.

The keeper sighed.

"Not well. It seems useless to take her about with me; she eats nothing, has no taste for anything; I cannot help thinking it was too late when we shifted, and that she had already taken the fever. She's so thin; see, madame, she's like a leaf. One of these days she'll go off like the others. My God!"

That "My God!" muttered between his teeth, was his only protest against the cruelty of official delay.

"She is shivering; I should think she was cold."

"It's the fever, madame."

"Wait a minute, we will warm her."

She took the shawl hanging on her arm and wrapped up the little one.

"Yes, yes, let it be so; it will come in as a bridal veil later on."

The father smiled, heart-broken; and, touching the little baby hand as the child was falling asleep again, pale as a corpse in all this white, he told her to thank the lady, and then disappeared, with a "My

God!" drowned in the cracking of the branches under his feet.

Fanny, now downcast, pressed closely to Jean with all the timid fondness of an emotional woman, whom sadness and joy causes to draw nearer to the man she loves.

Jean said to himself: "What a good girl!" but he did not allow it to influence his determination. On the contrary, the spot nerved him the more; for, on the slope of the path they were taking stood a vision of Irene, and with it came a memory of the bright smile which had greeted him there, and which had taken full possession of him, even before he knew its deep charm, or its secret fount of intelligent sweetness. It struck him that he had waited until the last moment, and that this was Thursday. "Come, it must be done"; and seeing a clearing a little farther on, made up his mind that should mark the limit.

The clearing was surrounded by fallen trees, in the midst of chips, stripped bark, fagots and charcoal-burning. A little lower down was The Pond, from which a white mist was rising; on the edge of it a little abandoned cottage, with dilapidated roof and broken, banging windows—the Hoche-

corne pest-house. Beyond that the woods rose towards Velizy, an extensive, fleece-like, russet slope—a compact and dreary mass of full-grown forest trees. He stopped abruptly :

“ Shall we rest a little ? ”

They sat down on a long fallen tree, an old oak which showed the marks of the axe where the branches had been squared. It was a secluded nook, enlivened by soft reflected sunbeams and the smell of hidden violets.

“ How delicious it is ! ” she said, languidly resting on his shoulder, and groping to kiss his neck. He drew back a little, and took her hand. Then, seeing his face suddenly hardened, she was startled.

“ Why, what is it ? ”

“ Bad news, my poor girl. Hedouin, you know, he who took my place——”

He spoke with difficulty, in a hoarse voice, the sound of which astonished even himself, but which steadied itself as he went on with the cut-and-dried story he had prepared. Hedouin, on reaching his post, had gone on the sick list, and he had been ordered to take his place. He had decided it would be easier to tell her this, less cruel than the truth. She heard him to the finish without a word, her face greyishly pale and her eyes staring.

"When do you start?" she asked, drawing back her hand.

"This evening—to-night."

And his voice falsely plaintive, he added:

"I shall have twenty-four hours to spend at Castelet, and then I embark at Marseilles."

"Enough! don't lie any more!" she burst out savagely, jumping up; "no more lies; you don't know the way. The truth is, you are going to be married. For a long time your family have been working for this. They are terribly afraid that I should keep you, that I should spoil your chance of catching typhus or yellow fever. Well, they have got their wish now. I hope the lady is to your taste. When I think of the bows I used to tie for you on Thursdays! Wasn't I a fool, eh?"

She gave a woeful, atrocious laugh; it contorted her mouth, showing on one side a gap caused by breaking—quite recent, no doubt, for he had not seen it before—one of her beautiful enamelled teeth, of which she was so proud; this missing tooth in the hollow, cadaverous, distracted face gave Gaussin a terrible shock.

"Listen to me," he said, taking hold of her and forcing her to sit at his side. "Well,

yes ! I am going to be married. My father wishes it, as you well know ; but what can it matter to you, since I must go away ? ”

She freed herself, nursing her anger.

“ And to tell me this you’ve dragged me miles into the woods ! You thought : ‘ At least, no one will hear her if she screams.’ No, see here ! there shall not be a shudder—not a tear. In the first place I’d like to see the back of you, handsome boy that you are ; you can go your way, I shall not call you back. Take yourself off then, with your wife, to the colonies, your ‘ little one,’ as they call them in your part of the country. She must be a sight, too, the ‘ little one,’ hideous as a gorilla, or else big in the family way. For you are as great a simpleton as those who have chosen her for you.”

She no longer minced matters, but launched out into a torrent of insults and abuse, until at last she could only stammer, close to his face the words, “ coward, liar, coward,” as one shakes a fist to exasperate.

Jean had now to listen to her without saying a word, or making an effort to quieten her. It was better she should take, it thus insulting, vile, the true daughter of old Legrand ; the separation would not seem so

cruel. Did her conscience tell her this ? All at once she stopped and fell head foremost on her lover's knees, with a great convulsive sob, and a broken moaning :

“ Forgive me, mercy !—I love you, I've only you—my love, my life, don't do this, do not leave me—what do you think is to become of me ? ”

His emotion was getting the better of him ; he had been afraid of this all along. Her tears wrought him up, and he threw his head back to keep his eyes from overflowing, trying to pacify her with foolish words, and ever the reasonable argument :

“ But since I must go.”

She raised herself, with this cry which unmasked all her hope :

“ Ah ! but you would not have gone. I should have said, ‘ Stay, let me love you still.’ Do you think you will be loved again as I love you ? There's plenty of time for you to marry, you're young enough ; whilst I—I shall soon be done for, used up, and then we should separate as a matter of course.”

He wished to stand up, and had the courage to do so, and to tell her that it was all to no effect ; but, holding tight to him, crawling in the muddy hollow, she forced him to sit

down again, and in front of him, between his legs, with the breath of her lips, the lascivious closing of her eyes, with childish endearments, her hands holding his hardening face, her* fingers in his hair, in his mouth, she strove to breathe into a flame the cold ashes of their love, reminding him softly of past pleasures, of dreamy awakenings, and of the frenzied fondlings of their Sunday afternoons. It was all as nothing to what she would yet give him ; she knew of other kinds of kisses, of other intoxications—she would invent new ones for him.

While she whispered these words, such as men only hear at the doors of infamy, big tears rolled down her agonised and fearful face, as she writhed and wailed :

“ Oh ! this must not be ; tell me it is not true that you are going to leave me.”

And then again there were sobs, moans and cries for help, as if she saw a knife in his hand.

The executioner was hardly braver than the victim. He feared her anger no more than her caresses ; but he could not endure her despair, or the clamour which filled the woods and lost itself over the stagnant and malarial waters, across which the gloomy

blood-red sun was setting. He had known he would have to suffer, but not so acutely ; the fascination of the new love could scarce prevent him from raising her in his arms and saying :

“ I will stay ; be quiet ; I will stay.”

How long had they been striving one with the other ? The sun was no more than a streak of light on the horizon ; The Pond grey slaty grey, and its malarious exhalations were invading the waste land and the woods and hills opposite. In the dusk which was falling on them he saw only the pale face raised to his, the open mouth wailing without a break. Shortly after, night fell, and the cries were hushed. Then came the sound of floods of tears, as incessant as the rain of a storm-gust, mingled with a deep and hollow “ Oh ! ” from time to time, as if she saw and were vainly endeavouring to chase away a constantly returning object of terror.

Then—nothing ! It is all over, the beast is dead. A cold wind rises, shakes the branches, carrying with it the echo of distant chimes.

“ Come, let’s go, don’t stop there.”

He raises her gently, feels her plastic in his hands, obedient as a child, and convulsed.

with great sighs. She seems to be a little afraid of, and to have respect for the man who has just shown himself so strong. She walks beside him, in his step, but timidly, without taking his arm ; and to see them thus staggering and dejected, finding their way by the yellow reflection of the soil, they might have been a couple of peasants returning home after a long and tiring day's work in the open air.

On the edge of the wood a light appears—Hochecorne's open door—showing the outlines of two men.

"Is that you, Gaussin ?" asks Hetteima's voice, as he comes forward with the keeper. They were beginning to feel anxious at their absence, and at the moans they heard in the wood. Hochecorne was about to take his gun to go and look for them.

"Good-evening, sir ; good-evening, madame. The little one's delighted with her shawl ! I had to put her to bed in it."

Their last action in unison—a kind action a short while since, when their hands were clasped for the last time round the body of the little dying child.

"Good-bye, good-bye, Hochecorne." All three hasten towards home, Hetteima still

very much puzzled by the sounds which had filled the wood. "It rose and fell, you would have thought some beast was being killed. Was it not strange you heard nothing?"

Neither make any reply.

At the corner of the *Pave des Gardes* Jean hesitates.

"Stay to dinner," said she, softly, entreatingly. "Your train has gone, you can go by the nine o'clock."

He enters with them. What is there to fear? Such scenes do not occur twice, and the least he can do is to give her this little consolation.

The room is warm, the lamp burns brightly, and the sound of their steps in the lane has warned the servant, who is placing the soup on the table.

"Here you are at last!" says Olympe, already seated, with her napkin tucked up under her short arms. She is removing the cover from the soup, but stops short with a cry:

"Good gracious, my dear!"

Ghastly, seeming ten years older, her eyes swollen and bloodshot, mud on her dress, even on her hair, with the wild and disordered dress of the lowest of prostitutes when hunted.

by the police—such was Fanny. She breathes a moment, her poor burning eyes blink at the light ; and, little by little, the warmth of the little house, the table gaily set, bring back the memory of happy days, and another flood of tears in which may be distinguished the words :

“ He is leaving me. He is going to be married.”

Hettema, his wife and the country woman who waits on them, look at one another, and at Gaussin.

“ Anyhow, let's have dinner,” says the fat man, who seems furious ; and the noise of greedy spoons is mingled with the splashing of water in the next room where Fanny is sponging her face. When she returns, drenched with powder, in a white woollen dressing-gown, the Hettemas look at her in great distress, fearing some fresh outburst, and are very much surprised to see her, without a word, fling herself ravenously on the food, like a shipwrecked sailor, stifling the gnawing of her grief and the whirlpool of her cries with everything she can lay her hands on—bread, cabbage, a guinea-fowl's wing, apples. She eats, and—she eats.

“ They talk, at first with constraint, then

more freely; and as the Hettemas only understand what is gross and material—whether preserves go well with pancakes, or whether a hair mattress is better than a feather bed to sleep on—they arrive without hindrance at the coffee, which the bulky pair season with burnt sugar, sipping it slowly, with elbows on the table

It is a pleasure to note the confiding and contented look exchanged between those elephantine, manger - and - litter companions. These two have no wish to part; Jean saw it; and, in the familiar room full of souvenirs, aids the torpor of fatigue, digestion and comfort which creeps over him. Fanny, who is watching him, has softly moved her chair, glided on to his knee, and slipped her arm under his.

“Hark!” he says abruptly. “Nine o’clock; quick, good-bye. I will write to you.”

He is up, outside, across the road, groping in the dark to open the gate in the lane. Two arms are thrown round him:

“Kiss me at least.”

He feels himself clasped to her naked body, the folds of the open dressing-gown round him, infusing him with the perfume

and heat of a woman's flesh, touching him to the quick by this parting kiss, which leaves in his mouth a taste of fever and tears. Feeling him weakening, she says very softly :

“ One more night, only one.”

“ A signal on the line. It is the train ! ”

How did he manage to shake her off, and rush to the station whose lamps were shining through the leafless branches ? He was wondering still, panting in a corner of the carriage, watching through the door for the lights of the cottage windows, for a white form at the gate.

“ Adieu ! adieu ! ” And this cry banished the silent agony of fear he had felt, when they reached the curve in the line, that he might see his mistress in the place she had occupied in his vision of death.

His head outside the window, he saw their little house pass into the distance—its light scarcely more than that of a shooting star—diminish, and then pass out of sight in the rolling landscape. All at once he experienced the pleasure of a supreme relief. How freely he could breathe ! How lovely was the whole of the Meudon valley, its great black hills triangulating in the distance, twinkling with myriads of lights, stippling

it in regular lines towards the Seine. Irene was waiting for him there, and he was going to her as fast as the train could take him, with all his lover's desire, and his heart of grace for a chaste and youthful life.

Paris! He stopped a cab to take him to the Place Vendôme. But in the gas-light he saw his clothes and boots covered with mud, a thick heavy mud—all his past life clung heavily and filthily to him.

"Oh, no, not to-night." And he went back to the old lodging-house in the Rue Jacob, where Le Fénat had ordered a room for him near his own.

CHAPTER XIII

ON the morrow, Césaire, who had undertaken the delicate mission of going to Chaville to remove his nephew's books and other effects, thus consummating the rupture, returned very late, just as Gaussin began to worry himself with all sorts of foolish and untoward suppositions. At last a cab, as heavy as a stage-coach, turned the corner of the Rue Jacob, loaded with corded boxes and an enormous trunk which he recognised as his. His uncle entered, mysterious and broken-hearted.

"It has been a long job getting everything together, so as to make one journey of it, and not have to go again."

Then, pointing to the two packages which the two servants were bringing into the room :

"There is the linen, the clothes and there the papers and books. Nothing is left except your letters ; she begged me to leave them for her to read again, and to have something of yours. I thought there was no danger in that. She is such a good girl."

He was panting away a long time, seated on the trunk, sponging his face with an unbleached silk handkerchief as big as a napkin. Jean dared not ask for details—in what frame of mind he had found her ; his uncle gave none for fear of distressing him. They filled their awkward silence, big with unspoken thoughts, by observations on the sudden change in the weather,—it had grown colder since the previous day—on the dreary aspect of that deserted and bare suburb of Paris, studded with factory chimneys and the enormous cast-iron cisterns of the market-gardeners. Then after a while :

“ She gave you nothing for me, uncle ? ”

“ No, you may feel at ease. She will never plague you ; she has accepted her position with much resolution and dignity.”

Why did Jean see in these words a covert censure and reproach for his harshness ?

“ All the same,” continued his uncle, “ putting one disagreeable task with another, I should prefer the claws of la Mornas to this unhappy creature’s despair.”

“ Did she cry much ? ”

“ I believe you, my boy. And so well, with such feeling, that I wept with her, without strength to——”

He snorted, and shook off his emotion like an old goat tossing its head.

"After all, what would you have? You, couldn't help it. You couldn't pass all your life there. Matters are very handsomely settled; you have left her with money and furniture. And now, let this sort of thing go to the devil! Get your marriage fixed up quickly. That, however, is beyond me—too serious. The consul can tackle that. I'm only good for left-handed settlements."

Then, taken all at once with a fit of melancholy, his face against the window-pane, and staring at the lowering sky and the trickling roofs:

"All the same, the world is getting sad. In my time, people took separations more gaily than that."

Le Fénat gone, followed by his elevator, Jean, deprived of his happy and prattling disposition, had a long week to get through, with a feeling of emptiness and solitude, all the out-of-one's element feeling of widowerhood. In such a case, even when there is no passion to regret, one looks for and feels the need of a companion; for life lived with another—the cohabitation of bed and

board creates a tissue of invisible and subtle bonds, of which the strength is only revealed by sorrow, or in an effort to divest oneself of them. The influence of contact and habit is so miraculously penetrating, that two beings living the same life come, in time, to resemble one another.

His five years with Sapho had not sufficed to mould him to this extent, but his body yet bore the marks of the chain, and felt its iron sway. It had even happened, on occasion, that his steps turned instinctively towards Chaville on leaving the office ; and he often found himself in the morning seeking, on the pillow at his side, the heavy black tresses innocent of a comb, where used to fall his morning kiss.

The evenings especially, in the lodging-house bedroom, seemed to him insufferably long. They reminded him of the first days of his entanglement of the presence of another, a delicate and silent mistress, whose little card scented his glass with the perfume of an alcove, and with the mystery of her name—Fanny Legrand. At these times he would start off to tire himself out, to walk, to try and forget himself amidst the music and lights of some small theatre, until old Bou-

chereau gave him permission to 'spend three evenings a week with his betrothed.

At length it was arranged. Irene loved him ; uncle was willing ; and the marriage was fixed for the beginning of April, at the end of the term. There remained, then, three months of winter to see, to study, and to long for one another ; to paraphrase lovingly, and delightfully, the first look which binds souls together, and the first avowal which troubles them.

The evening of signing the marriage contract, on returning home, without the least desire for sleep, Jean thought he would put his room in order and ship shape—the natural instinct of bringing our life into line with our ideas. He set out his table and his books. hitherto unpacked and stowed away at the bottom of one of the hastily-made boxes, the law books between a pile of handkerchiefs and a garden jacket. From the half-opened leaves of a Dictionary of Commercial Law—the book he most frequently used—there fell a letter, without an envelope, in his mistress's handwriting.

Fanny had calculated on the chance of future work, distrustful of Césaire's fugitive compassion, and believing it would arrive

most surely thus. He was unwilling to open it at first; but, seeing the opening words were very gentle and reasonable, and her agitation only to be inferred by the trembling hand and uneven lines, he relented. She only asked one favour—one only—that he would go and see her now and then. She would say nothing; reproach him with nothing; neither with his marriage nor this separation which she knew to be thorough and final. Oh, simply to see him!

"Just think what an awful blow it was for me; so unexpected, so sudden. It seems as if death had been, or a fire, not that I am distraught. I weep—I wait; and I look at the place where I was so happy. You only can reconcile me to this new situation. It is a kindness, come and see me, so that I may not feel so lonely; I am afraid of myself."

These lamentations and entreaties ran through the whole letter, always winding up with the same words:

"Come! come!" He could almost fancy he was in the glade in the middle of the forest, with Fanny at his feet, in the violet-tinted dusk, the poor, distorted, tear-stained face raised to his, and the lips opening to moan in the darkness. This it was that pursued

him all night, that troubled his sleep, and not the intoxication he had enjoyed with her. It was the aged, withered face which he saw again, in spite of all his efforts to put between himself and it the other face with its pure contour, like a carnation in flower, which the avowal of love had tinged with rosy flushes under the eyes.

Eight days had elapsed since the letter was written ; eight days that the unhappy girl had waited for a word or a visit, the encouragement to resignation which she asked for. But how was it she had not written since ? Perhaps she was ill ; old misgivings came back again. He thought Hettema might be able to give him some news ; and, knowing his regular habits he went and waited for him in front of the Comite d'Artillerie.

The last stroke of ten was striking at the church of Saint Thomas d'Aquin, when the fat man turned the corner of the little square, collar turned up, pipe in mouth, but held with both hands to warm his fingers. Jean saw him coming some distance away, and was very much affected at the memories he recalled ; but Hettema greeted him with a show of impatience which he scarcely disguised :

"You here! We have just about cursed you this week! we went to live in the country to be quiet.

At the door, while finishing his pipe, he told him that on the previous Sunday they had invited Fanny to dinner, with the child who had a day's leave; by way of distracting her mind a little from her wretched thoughts. As a matter of fact they were merry enough at table, and she had even sung to them a little at dessert. They separated about ten, and the Hettemas were preparing to tumble deliciously into bed when all at once someone knocked on the shutters, and little Josaph's voice calling out terrified :

"Come quick! mamma is going to poison herself."

Hettema rushed off, and arrived in time to take a bottle of laudanum from her by force. He had been compelled to struggle for it, to take her in his arms, to hold her and defend himself against her desperate blows, and the comb with which she tore his face. In the struggle the bottle broke, the laudanum was spilt over everything, and all his clothes were stained and tainted with the poison.

"But you can well understand that such scenes, and all this varied drama, are not

to the taste of quiet people. 'We've had enough of it ; I've given notice ; and next month I move.'

He put his pipe in its case, and, with a quiet good-bye, disappeared under the low arch of a little courtyard, leaving Gaussin altogether upset by what he had heard.

He conjured up the scene in that room which had been their room, the fright of the child calling for help, and the brutal scrimmage with the huge man. He seemed to taste the flavour of the opium, and the drowsy bitterness of the spilt laudanum. The horror of it lasted him the rest of the day, and was intensified by the thought how isolated she would now be. The Hettemas gone, who would stay her hand from fresh attempts ?

A letter came which put him a little more at ease. Fanny thanked him for not being so harsh as he sought to appear since he took an interest in a poor deserted woman :

" They told you, did they not ? I wanted to die ; it was because I felt so lonely. I tried, I could not, they stopped me, perhaps my hand trembled—the fear of suffering, of becoming ugly. Oh, that little Doré how could she have had the courage ! I was ashamed at first that

I had failed, then I was glad to think that I could write to you, and love you from a distance might see you again, for I have not lost hope that you will come some day, as an unhappy friend is visited in a house of mourning—from pity, from pity alone."

After that there came from Chaville every two or three days a capricious correspondence, long, short, a diary of sorrow which he had not the heart to return, and which aggravated, in his tender heart, the green wound of a pity without love—felt, not for the mistress, but for a human being who suffered through him.

The removal of her neighbours was the theme one day ; witnesses of her past happiness, they took away through him so many remembrances with them. Now she had nothing to remind her of him but the furniture, the walls of their little house and the serving-woman, a poor uncouth creature, no more interested in things than the oriole all shivering with the winter cold, a sad and ruffled object in the corner of his cage.

Another day, a watery gleam of sunshine brightening up the window-panes, she awoke happy, persuaded ; he will come to-day ! Why ? Nothing — only an idea.

Yet, at once, she set about making the house look nice, and the woman smart in her Sunday dress and the cap he liked ; then, until evening, until the last streak of light, she counted the trains from the dining-room window, and listened for his coming along the Paves des Gardes. Must she not have been mad !

Sometimes no more than a line : “ *It rains ; it is gloomy ; I am alone and crying for you.* ” Or else she was satisfied by enclosing in an envelope a poor flower, all soaked and stiff with hoar-frost—the last in their little garden. This flower, plucked from beneath the snow, more than all her complainings, told him of winter, loneliness and desertion ; he could see the spot at the end of the walk and a woman’s skirt, soaked to the hem, going along the flower beds, backwards and forwards in solitude.

This agonising pity of the heart caused him to live with Fanny still, in spite of their separation. He thought of her and pictured her without ceasing ; yet, by a singular lapse of memory, although but five or six weeks had gone by since their rupture, and though the least details of their home were still vivid—La Balue’s cage opposite a wooden cuckoo-clock won at a country fête, even the

hazel branches which the faintest breeze beat against their dressing-room windows—the woman herself was no longer distinct. He saw her in a misty haze, a single, sorry detail standing out in bold relief—the deformed mouth, the smile marred by the missing tooth.

Thus ageing, what would become of the poor creature with whom he had slept so long ? When she had run through the money he had left her, where would she go, or how would she sink ? Suddenly, there came to mind a memory of the wretched night-walker he had encountered that evening in the tavern, dying of thirst over a slice of smoked salmon. She would become like that—she whose loving solicitude and faithful, passionate love he had so long enjoyed. The idea drove him to desperation. Still, what could be done ? Because, unhappily, he had met this woman, and had lived with her for some time, was he condemned to keep her always, and to sacrifice his happiness for her ? Why he, and not the others ? What sort of justice was that ?

Although he had fully made up his mind not to see her again, he wrote to her. His letters, intentionally cool and matter-of-fact, betrayed his emotion under their practical

and consoling advice. He offered to make it possible for her to take Josaph from school, to have him with her to occupy and distract her ; but Fanny refused. What would be the good of bringing the child into the midst of her grief and discouragement ? It was quite enough on Sunday when the little one roamed from chair to chair, wandered from dining-room to the garden, guessing that some great evil had saddened the house, and never ventured to ask for news of " Papa Jean " since he had been told, with sobs, that he had gone away, and that he would never come back again.

" All my papas, then, go away ! "

These words of the abandoned child, occurring in a heart-rending letter laid heavy on Gaussin's heart. Soon, he got so low-spirited at the thought of her loneliness at Chaville that he advised her to come back to Paris, and to mix with the world. With her sad knowledge of men and partings, Fanny could only look upon this suggestion as utterly selfish, a wish to rid himself of her for good through her taking one of those sudden fancies for someone to which she was liable ; and she told him frankly what she thought of it.

" You know what I have already told you. I will remain your wife in spite of all—your loving, faithful wife. Our little home is impregnated with you, and I would not quit it for all the world. What should I do in Paris? I am disgusted with that past life of mine which drives you away; besides, think of what you would expose us to. You think you are very firm? Then come, naughty boy! once—only once."

He did not go; but one Sunday afternoon, when alone and at work, he heard two little knocks at the door. He started, recognising her old, quick fashion of announcing herself. Fearing to find some order to the contrary below, she had mounted at a breath without inquiry. He approached, his footsteps deadened by the carpet, and heard her breathing through the chinks of the door.

" Jean, are you there ? "

Oh! that humble and broken voice! Yet again—not at all loudly:

" Jean! " Then a plaintive sigh, the rustling of a letter, and a good-bye kiss thrown to him.

She went down the staircase step by step, slowly, as if she expected to be called back—only then did Jean pick up the letter and

open it. They had buried the little Hoche-corne that morning at the Hospital for Sick Children. She had come with the father and several people from Chaville and had not been able to resist coming up to see him or to leave these lines written before she started :

“ Shall I tell you, if I lived in Paris I would never leave your staircase. Adieu my dear ; I am going home.”

Tears came to his eyes while reading it. He recalled the same scene in the Rue de l'Arcade, the grief of the dismissed lover, the letter slipped under the door, and Fanny's heartless laugh. She loved him then more than he loved Irene ! Or, is it that a man, being more mixed up in the struggle of business and life has not, like a woman, the exclusiveness of love, forgetful of, and indifferent to everything outside her one absorbing passion.

This torturing pain of pity from which he suffered was only eased when with Irene. A glance from her clear eyes softened and dispelled his anguish. Then there only remained a great weariness, a temptation to lay his head on her shoulder, and, thus protected, to remain there speechless and motionless.

“ “ What ails you ? ” she would say. “ Are you not happy ? ”

Yes, very happy. But if he were happy, why this sadness and tears? At times he would have liked to have told her all, as he would tell a kind and sympathetic friend; without thinking—poor fool!—of the misgivings which such confidences would rouse in a young heart, or of the incurable wound it would deal to the truthfulness of love. If only he could have carried her off—have fled with her! He felt that would have ended his torture; but old Bouchereau would not budge an hour before the appointed time.

“I am old, I am ill. I shall see nothing of my child; do not rob me of these last days.”

Beneath his stern demeanour this great man was the best of men. Condemned, without hope of reprieve, by a heart affection, watching and commenting on its progress, speaking about it with an admirable coolness, he continued his lectures half-suffocated, and examined patients who felt less ill than he did. This truly great man had one weakness—a clear mark of his Tourangean peasant origin—a slavish respect for titles and nobility. His recollection of the little turrets of Castelet, and the ancient name of d'Armandy, had induced him more readily to accept Jean as his niece's husband.

The marriage was to take place at the little country seat, and so obviate a journey for Jean's invalid mother, who sent her future daughter a nice affectionate letter every week, dictated to Divonne or one of the little Bethany twins. Jean was delighted to talk to Irene about his people, to feel at home at Castelet at the Place Vendome, all his affections clustering around his beloved.

One thing, however, startled him: he felt so old! He was weary of the things in which Irene took a childish glee—they failed to interest him; the joys of married life—he had already discounted them. For instance, one evening, going over a list of all the things they would have to take to the Consulate—furniture and stuffs to choose—he came to a stop in the middle of it, and his pen hesitated. He was terrified at his thoughts—recalling the furnishing in the Rue d'Amsterdam—horried at the new life commencing with so much of its sweet joys used up, exhausted by five years spent with a woman in a travesty of marriage and household management.

CHAPTER XIV

“ YES, dear boy, he died last night in Rosa’s arms. I have just taken him to be stuffed.”

De Potter, the composer, had button-holed Jean on coming out of a shop in the Rue de Bac, and with a loquacity very little in keeping with the hard impassive features of a man of business, narrated the martyrdom of poor Bichito, killed by the Paris winter, shrivelled by the cold in spite of cotton-wool padding and a spirit-lamp under his little nest for the last two months, as is done for children born before their time. Nothing could cure him of shivering ; and the night before, surrounded by them all, a last shiver shook him from head to tail, and he died like a good Christian, thanks to the floods of holy water sprinkled on his rough skin—his life ebbing away in ever-changing veinings and prismatic movements—Mamma Pilar saying as she did it, her eyes raised to heaven :

“ Dios loui pardonne ! ”

“ I laugh about it, but my heart is heavy all the same ; especially when I think of the

grief of my poor Rosa whom I left in tears. Happily, Fanny was with her——”

“ Fanny ? ”

“ Yes ; we had not seen her for a long time. She dropped in this morning in the middle of the drama, and the good girl stayed to console her friend:”

He added, without noticing the impression caused by his words :

“ It is all over then ? You no longer live together ? Do you remember our conversation on the lake at Enghien. You, at least, profit by the lessons given you.” He pointed his approval with a shade of envy.

Gaussin knitted his brows ; he was really distressed to know that Fanny had returned to Rosaire ; but he was vexed with himself for this weakness. After all, he no longer had any right to control her movements, nor was he responsible for her way of life. De Potter stopped at a house in the Rue de Beaune, a very old street in a once aristocratic quarter of Paris, into which they had just turned. It was here that he lived, or was supposed to live, for appearance sake ; in reality, his time was spent between the Avenue de Villiers and Enghien, and he only put in an

occasional appearance at the conjugal domicile in order that his wife and child might not appear too neglected.

Jean was about to go his way and had already taken his leave, when de Potter retained his hand in his own long hands, hardened by constant playing, and said, without the least embarrassment, like a man who unrestrainedly indulges his vice unchecked :

“ Do me a favour, come up with me. I am supposed to dine with my wife at home to-day, but I cannot really leave my poor Rosa all alone in her despair. You will serve as a pretext for my going out, and save me tiresome explanations.”

The composer's study in the handsome, but chilly suite of rooms on the second floor, presented all the dreary appearance of an unused room. Everything was too neat, nothing out of place, no signs of life in the furniture and surrounding. The table was majestically furnished with an enormous bronze inkstand, dry and shining as when exposed in the shop window ; never a book or sheet of paper ; not a sign of a score on the old spinet-shaped piano which had inspired his first productions. A white marble

bust—the bust of a young, delicate-featured woman, with a sweet expression, pale as the light of a closing day—caused the draped and empty fireplace to look colder than ever, and gazed on the walls hung with gilded and beribboned crowns, medals and commemorative frames, the whole glorious and vain collection generously left to his wife as compensation, and preserved by her as ornaments on the tomb of her happiness.

They had scarcely entered when the study door opened and Madame de Potter appeared :

“ Is that you, Gustave ? ”

She thought he was alone, but stopped short on seeing a stranger, obviously uneasy. Elegant, pretty and tastefully dressed, she looked more refined than her bust, her soft features full of nervous and courageous determination. Society was divided as to her character. Some censured her for putting up with her husband's open neglect—his infidelity was notorious ; others, on the contrary, admired her silent resignation. The general view decided that she was a quiet woman, loving her own ease above everything, and finding sufficient consolation for her widowhood in the love of a beautiful child,

and the distinction of bearing the name of a great man.

The composer introduced his companion, and concocted some sort of falsehood to release him from dining at home. Jean saw that, apart from the embarrassment depicted on the young woman's face, a great sorrow lurked under the polished exterior, showing itself in the force of the vacant look, seeing and hearing nothing more, as if absorbed in grief. Ostensibly she accepted the excuse which she did not believe, and contented herself by saying gently :

"Raymond will cry ; I promised that we would dine at his bedside."

"How is he ?" asked de Potter, absent-minded and impatient.

"Better, but he's always coughing. Won't you come and see him ?"

He stammered something under his breath, pretending to look round the room :

"Not now, very busy, appointment at club at six." What he wished to avoid was being alone with her.

"Good-bye, then," said the young woman, suddenly composed, her features as unruffled as a sheet of still water just disturbed to its depths by a stone. She bowed and disappeared.

“ Let’s be off ! ”

De Potter, free once more, dragged Gaussin away. He watched him going downstairs in front of him—stiff in his overcoat of correct English cut—a sinister libertine, blinded with passion, full of sympathy when taking his mistress’s chameleon to be stuffed, but who could leave home without kissing his sick child.

“ All that, my dear boy,” said the composer, as if he divined his friend’s thoughts, “ all that is the fault of those who made me marry. A fine mess they made of it for me and that poor woman. What madness to try and make me a husband and a father ! I was Rosa’s lover ; so I have remained, and so I shall remain till one of us dies. Vice which gets hold of you at the right moment sticks to you—can you ever free yourself ? You—are you sure that if Fanny had wished—” He hailed a passing cab, and as he got in :

“ Talking of Fanny, you know the news ? Flamant has been pardoned, and has left Mazas. It was Déchelette’s petition. Poor Déchelette, he has done some good even after his death.”

At a dead stand, but feeling a mad desire to ‘run’ after, and lay hold of the wheels

jolting away at full speed along the gloomy street, where the gas was being lit, Gaussin was astonished to find himself so taken aback.

“Flamant pardoned ; released from Mazas ! ”

He repeated the words in a low voice, recognising in them the reason of Fanny's silence for several days past, and the sudden interruption of her lamentations. She had found comfort in the caresses of a consoler ; naturally the first thought of the wretched man, free at last, must have been for her.

He recalled the affectionate letters dated from the prison, the obstinacy of his mistress in defending him alone when she held the others so cheaply ; and, instead of shaking hands with himself over an event which, logically, should have freed him of all anxiety or remorse, it caused him unaccountable misery, keeping him awake and feverish part of the night. Why ? He loved her no longer, only he thought of the letters still in this woman's hands. She would read them to the other man, perhaps, and—who knows ?—under some bad influence she might use them one day to disturb his quiet and happiness.

Whether real or false, embodying without a suspicion of it in his mind a craving of

another kind, this solicitude about his letters decided him to take an imprudent step—the visit to Chaville which he had always so steadfastly refused. But who else was there to undertake such a private and delicate mission? One February morning he took the ten o'clock train, very calm in mind and heart, with one misgiving, that he would find the house shut up, and that the woman had disappeared with her gaol-bird.

At the curve in the line, the open shutters and the curtained windows of the little cottage reassured him; and remembering his emotion as he saw the little twinkling lights receding in the gloom, he laughed at himself, and at his evanescent impressions. He was not the same man, and he would surely no more find the same woman. Still it was only two months ago. The trees along the line had not put on fresh leaves; they had the same rusty appearance as on the day of the rupture, and her echoing cries.

No one else got out at the station. In the cold and penetrating fog, he took the little footpath, all slippery with trodden snow, and passed under the railway arch. He met no one until he got to the *Pave des Garges*, on turning into which a man and

child appeared, followed by a railway porter, pushing before him a barrow loaded with trunks.

The child, muffled to the eyes with a scarf, his cap drawn over his ears, stifled an exclamation as they passed close by.

"Why, it's Josaph," he said to himself, a little astonished and saddened by this ingratitude on the youngster's part and turning round he met the eyes of the man who was leading the child by the hand. That intelligent and refined face, paled by imprisonment, the ready-made clothes bought the day before, and the fair beard-stubble which had not had the time to grow since leaving Mazas——

Flamant ! by God ! And Josaph was his son !

It was a revelation in a flash. He recalled everything, understood it all—from the prison letter, when the handsome engraver confided to his mistress the child he had in the country, to the mysterious arrival of the little one ; Hettema's confusion when speaking of the adoption, and Fanny's glances at Olympe—they had all leagued together to make him support the forger's son. What a damned fool he had been ! How they must have

laughed at him ! A disgust at all this shameful past came upon him, a longing to escape far away ; but, there were things troubling him he wished to know. The man and child had gone ; why not she ? Then, his letters—he must have his letters ; nothing of his must be left in this retreat of impurity and evil.

“ Madame ! Here’s master ! ”

“ Which master ? ” naively asked a voice from the bedroom.

“ I.”

There was a cry, a leap, then :

“ Wait, I am getting up—I am coming.”

Still in bed, past noon ! Jean thought he could guess why ; he knew the reason of these tired, jaded mornings.

Whilst he waited in the dining-room, the most insignificant objects in it all familiar to him, the whish of the up-train, the trembling “ ma-ay ” of a goat in the neighbouring garden, the plates and dishes lying higgledy-piggledy on the table—all carried him back to the old mornings, and the hasty little breakfasts before starting.

Fanny entered and sprang towards him ; then, stopping short at his cool greeting, they

remained a second astonished, hesitating. A meeting on the morrow of a shattered intimacy is, as it were, at both ends of a blown-up bridge, a gap between bank and bank, and between one and the other, the immense gulf of a rising and devouring flood.

"Good morning," she said very softly, without budging.

She thought him altered, grown pale. He was astonished to see her so young again, a little fatter only ; not so tall as he had pictured her, but enveloped in the peculiar radiance, the bloom of complexion and eyes, and a sweetness as of a cool green sward, as he had known her even after nights of ardent love. She had remained then in the wood, in the recesses of the valley filled with dead leaves—she whose memory had consumed him with pity.

"One gets up late in the country," he said ironically.

She excused herself, using a headache as a pretext speaking impersonally, uncertain whether to use the forms of intimacy or those of mere politeness ; then, noticing his eyes silently questioning the remains of the meal :

"It's the child ; he breakfasted here this morning before going——"

“Going ? Where ? ”

He tried to speak in a voice of extreme indifference, but the glint in his eyes betrayed him.

Fanny answered :

“The father turned up again ; he came to take him away.”

“On leaving Mazas, you mean ? ”

She started, but she did not attempt to lie.

“Well, yes. I promised ; I have kept my promise. Many a time I wished to tell you all, but I dared not. I was afraid you would send him away, poor little fellow. And,” she added timidly, “you were so jealous.”

He laughed loudly and disdainfully. Jealous—he—of that convict ? Get along ! Feeling his anger rising, he cut it short, and said quickly what brought him. His letters ! Why had she not given them to Césaire ? It would have saved a painful interview, for both of them.

“That’s true,” she said, still very meek, “but I will give you them now ; they are there.”

He followed her into the bedroom, saw the rumpled bed, the clothes hastily thrown over the two pillows, noticed the smell of cigarettes mingled with the perfume of a woman’s toilet, which he recognised, as well.

as the little mother-of-pearl box on the table. The same thought struck them both :

"There are not many of them," said she, opening the box ; "we should not run any risk of setting the place on fire."

He was silent, agitated, his mouth dry, hesitating to approach the tumbled bed before which she was running through the letters for the last time, with her head, bent forward, the neck firm and white below the twisted mass of hair ; and in its easy pose, her voluptuous figure looking stouter beneath the folds of the floating woollen gown.

"There ! They are all here."

He took the packet and put it abruptly in his pocket, for his thoughts were of something else. Jean asked :

"Then he has taken away his child ? Where are they going to ?"

"To Morvan, his own home, to hide himself and work at his engraving, which he will send to Paris under a false name."

"And you ? Are you thinking of staying here ?"

She averted her eyes to escape his, stammering out that it would be very melancholy. So she thought—she would, perhaps, go away soon—a little change.

"To Morvan, no doubt? ; A family party!" And letting loose his jealous fury:

"Why not say at once that you are going to join your thief, that you are going to live together? You have wanted to do so long enough. Go! Return to your dirty hole. Harlot and forger—they go well together. It was very good of me to try to lift you out of the mud."

She remained perfectly unmoved and speechless, a gleam of triumph filtering from her half-closed eyes. The more he lashed her with his savage, withering irony, the prouder she seemed; and a trembling in the corners of her mouth became more and more apparent. Then he spoke of his own happiness, of young and chaste love, the only real love. Oh, what a soft pillow to sleep on, the heart of a virtuous woman. Then abruptly, lowering his voice, as if ashamed:

"I just met him, your Flamant; he passed the night here?"

"Yes; it was late and snowing. We made him up a bed on the sofa."

"You lie; he slept there. It only needs to see the bed, and to look at you."

"Well, what then?" She lifted her face

to his, her great, grey eyes full of libidinous light. "Did I know that you would come? Besides, having lost you, what did all the rest matter to me? I was sad, lonely, disgusted."

"And then, the flavour of prison! Seeing the time you have been living with an honest man that must have been full flavoured, eh? How you must have stuffed yourself with caresses! Ah! slut! now then——"

She saw the blow coming without evading it, and received it full in the face. Then with a muffled murmur of pain, of joy, of victory, she sprang upon him, flung her arms round him: "My darling, my sweetheart! You love me still——"

They rolled together on the bed.

The noise of an express rushing by awoke him with a start towards evening. Opening his eyes, it was a few minutes before he could realise where he was, all alone in the great bed. His limbs, stiff as from over-walking, it seemed to be laid one against the other, disjointed and devoid of all energy. During the afternoon a great deal of snow had fallen. One could hear it melting in the silence—

that of a desert—trickling on the walls and down the window-panes, dripping from the eaves, now and then on the coke fire, splashing the hearth.

Where was he ? What was he doing there ? Little by little—from the reflection of the little garden the room appeared to him all white, lighted up from below—a large portrait of Fanny loomed up before him, and the remembrance of his fall came upon him without causing the least astonishment. From the moment he had entered, in face of the bed, he had felt himself recaptured, lost ; the sheets attracted him like a whirlpool, and he said to himself :

“ If I am drawn into it, it will be without remedy, and for ever.”

It was done ; and, beneath a gloomy disgust at his cowardice, he found solace in the idea that he would never again rise out of his degradation—the poor comfort of a wounded man who, drained of his blood, drags his sores along, and throws himself on a muck-heap to die there ; worn out with suffering, with struggling, all his veins open, plunging deliciously into the soft and fetid warmth.

What remained for him to do now was horrible, but very simple. Return to Irene

after this treason, risk a life like de Potter's ? If he had fallen low, he had not come to that. He would write to Bouchereau—the great physiologist who was the first to study and describe diseases of the will—and submit to him a terrible case, the story of his life since he first met this woman, when she put her hand on his arm, down to the day when, believing himself saved, in the full swing of happiness, of transport, she had seized him again by the magic of the past, that horrible past in which love had so small a place, only cowardly habit and vice, which had eaten to his bones.

The door opened. Fanny walked softly into the room so as not to wake him. From between his closed eyelids he watched her, alert and strong, youthful again, warming her feet, soaked with the snow of the garden, at the fire, from time to time turning towards him with the little smile she had worn that morning during the quarrel. She came and took the packet of Maryland from its usual place, rolled a cigarette, and was going out, but he detained her.

: “ You're not asleep then, ? ”

"No ; sit down there, and let us talk."

She sat on the edge of the bed, a little surprised at this seriousness.

"Fanny. We will both go——"

She thought at first that he was joking to test her. But the precise details which he gave quickly undeceived her. There was a post vacant—at Arica ; he would apply for it. It was a matter of a fortnight—time to get their trunks ready

"And your marriage ?"

"Not a word about that. What I have done is beyond recall. I see plainly that it is all over, that I can never leave you again."

"Poor baby," said she, with a sad tenderness—slightly scornful.

Then after taking two or three whiffs :

"Is it far, this country you mention ?"

"Arica ? Very far ; in Peru." And in a low voice : "Flamant will not be able to rejoin you."

She remained, thoughtful and mysterious, in the clouds of smoke. He kept holding her hand, stroking her bare arm, and lulled by the trickling of the water all around the little house, he closed his eyes and sank gently into the mire.

CHAPTER XV

NERVOUS, trembling, under steam, already on the way, like most people when about to set out on a voyage, Gaussin has been in Marseilles for the last two days. Fanny is to join him here and embark with him. Everything is ready, the berths taken—two first-class cabins for the vice-consul of Arica travelling with his sister-in-law. He is here pacing the faded red tiles of the hotel bedroom, awaiting in a ferment his mistress and the sailing of the vessel.

He dare not go out, and so is compelled to potter and fidget about the premises. The street bewilders him as if he were a criminal or a deserter. It seems to him that his father or old Bouchereau will appear at every corner of this confused and swarming Marseilles street, and clapping their hands on his shoulder, will capture him and take him back.

He shuts himself up, has his meals sent up, without even going down to the table d'hôte, reads without fixing his eyes, throws

himself on his bed, diverting his vague siestas with the "Wreck of the *Perouse*" and the "Death of Captain Cook," hanging all fly-blown on the walls, and for hours on end, lounges over the worm-eaten wooden balcony, shaded by a yellow awning, as patched as the sail of a fishing boat. His hotel, the *Hotel du Jeune Anacharsis*—the name, chosen at hazard in the directory, tempted him when he agreed upon a place of meeting Fanny—is an old inn, not at all luxurious, not even very clean. It faces the port, however; is on the sea—on the voyage. Under its windows is the open-air stock-in-trade of a bird-fancier—parrots, cockatoos and soft warbling foreign birds—the stacked cages saluting the break of day with a sound as of a virgin forest, to be deadened and drowned, as the day advances, by the bustle and noise of the port, regulated by the great bell of *Notre Dame de la Garde*.

There is a confusion of oaths in all languages, the cries of watermen, porters and shell-fish vendors, interlarded with the beating of hammers in the dry-dock, the grinding of cranes, the sonorous noise of the steel-yards bumping on the pavement, ships' bells, steam whistles, rhythmic pump-beats, capstans work-

ing, bilge-water discharging, and steam escaping—all this din doubled and reverberated, the neighbouring sea acting as a sounding board ; whilst from time to time comes the hoarse roar, like the breathing of some marine monster, of a great transatlantic liner putting out to sea.

The smells, too, call up distant lands, and quays sunnier and hotter than this one ; sandal-wood and log-wood in course of discharge ; lemons, oranges, pistachio-nuts, beans, ground-nuts, their pungent, acrid odour escaping with clouds of tropical dust into an atmosphere saturated with salt water, and the burning herbs and greasy fumes of cook-shops.

Evening comes, these sounds are hushed, and the heavy atmosphere descends and evaporates. Jean, reassured by the darkness, lifts the blinds and looks at the sleeping port, black with its sea of masts, yards and bowsprits ; whilst in the silence there is only the sound of lapping waves, or the distant barking of a dog on board some ship. Out at sea, far away from land, the Planier revolving light, alternating red and white, rips up the darkness, and shows in a lightning flash the outlines of islands, forts and rocks. This flashing light, the safeguard of thousands of

lives on the horizon, is also his voyage, inviting him and making signs to him, which calls him in the voice of the wind, in the swell of the open sea, and in the hoarse throat-rattle and whistle of the steamer somewhere in the roads.

Still twenty-four hours to wait ; Fanny will not join him before Sunday. These three spare days he meant to spend with his people, devoting them to the dear ones he will not see for several years, whom he may never see again ; but on the first evening of his arrival at Castelet, when his father knew the marriage was broken off and had guessed the cause, an explanation took place, violent and terrible.

What are we then ? What are our tenderest affections—those nearest the heart—that anger between two things of the same flesh, and the same blood, should tear, wrench apart, and sweep away love and all natural feelings, however deep and delicately rooted, with the blind, irresistible force of a typhoon of the China seas, which the hardest sailors are not to call to mind, turning pale as they say :

“Don’t talk of it——”

He will never speak of it, but he will remember all his life the terrible scene on the terrace at Castelet—the home of his happy childhood—in view of the beautiful, calm horizon, the immovable pines, myrtles and cypresses clinging together and shuddering, as it were, at his father’s curse. He will always see the grand old man, his cheeks convulsed and twitching, coming up to him with a gesture and look of hatred, speaking such words as are never forgiven, driving him from home and honour :

“Go ! away with your strumpet ! You are dead to us ! ”

Nor will he forget the little twins crying, kneeling on the steps, begging forgiveness for their big brother, and Divonne’s ashy face, without a look, without a good-bye for him ; whilst above, behind the window-pane, the invalid, with sweet and anxious face, was asking why all this disturbance, and why her Jean was hurrying off without kissing her.

This thought that he had not kissed his mother made him turn back when half-way to Avignon ; he left Césaire with the carriage in the valley, and by a cross-road entered Castelet through the home enclosure like a

thief. The night was dark ; he stumbled over the dead vines ; and even finally lost his way, seeking the house in the darkness, a stranger already in his own home. The vague reflection from the white plastered walls guided him at last ; but the main entrance was locked, and the lights in all the windows extinguished. Ring, call ? He dared not for fear of his father. Two or three times he went round the house, hoping to find some shutter loose. But Divonne, as usual, had gone her evening round with the lantern ; and after a lingering look at his mother's room, and a heart-deep adieu to the home of his childhood, which also seemed as it were, to repulse him, he fled in despair, with a remorse which never leaves him.

Usually, prior to a long absence, or a voyage involving the perils of sea and wind, parents and friends prolong their leave-taking until the last moment, passing the last day together, going on board, and looking into the cabins, the better to follow the journey. Several times a day Jean sees loving pilgrimages such as these pass the hotel, numerous and noisy sometimes ; but he is especially touched by a family group on the floor above. An

old man and an old woman, well-to-do country people, in cloth jackets and yellow cambric, have come to see their boy off, and to stay with him until the steamer leaves. Leaning out of the window, the time hanging on his hands while waiting, Jean sees all three, clasping one another's arms, the sailor in the middle, very close together. They do not speak ; they embrace.

Watching them, Jean thinks what a happy parting he might have had. His father his young sisters, and, hanging on him with soft and trembling hand, his beloved, whose keen spirit and adventurous soul were excited by the sight of a ship ploughing the deep. Vain regrets. The die is cast, his fate is working itself out ; he has only to go and forget.

How slow and cruel the hours of the last night seemed to him ! He turned and tossed in his bed in the hotel, watched for daybreak on the window-panes, marking slow change from black grey, and then to the white of dawn, the lighthouse stippling it with red sparks that faded in the rising sun.

Not till then does sleep come to him. He awakes with a start by the flood of light in his room, and the confused cries from the bird-fancier's cages. The multitude of chimes

of a Marseilles Sunday sound over the quiet quays, machinery at rest, and pennants floating mast-high. Ten o'clock already. The Paris express arrives at mid-day. He dresses himself quickly to go and meet his mistress ; they will breakfast on the sea front, then the luggage will be taken on board, and at five o'clock, the signal.

A glorious day, a deep sky, white-patched by the wheeling gulls, the sea of a dipper mineral blue, and a clear horizon, on which sails, smoke, everything is visible. All glistens and dances ; and, as though it were the natural music of these transparent sunny glades of sky and water, some harps under the hotel windows are playing an Italian air, whose divine fluency, however, as thus dragged out on strings, is cruelly racking to the nerves. It is more than music, it is a winged rendering of the enchantment of the South, life and love overflowing in tears. The memory of Irene passes into the ebb and flow of the wailing melody. How far away it seems. How lovely the lost paradise. What eternal regrets for hopelessly shattered dreams !

Come !

Going out, Jean meets a waiter on the threshold.

"A letter for the consul. It came this morning, but the consul was sound asleep!"

Travellers of note are rare at the Hotel du Jeune Anacharsis, so these good Marseilles folks take every opportunity of addressing their guest by his title. Who could have written to him? No one knows his address—at least no one but Fanny. Scrutinising the envelope closely, his heart sinks with fear: he understands.

"Well, no! I will not go. It would be too gross a folly, for which I have no inclination. Such plunges, my dear boy, require youth—that, I no longer have; or the blindness of mad passion—that, neither of us possesses now. Five years ago, in the happy times, a sign from you would have made me follow you to the ends of the earth, for you cannot deny that I have loved you passionately. I gave you all I had to give; and when I was obliged to wrench myself apart from you, I suffered as never I suffered before for any man. But it wears me out—do you know?—a love like that; feeling you are so handsome, so young, and also, fearing I should lose you. Now, I can stand

it no more ; you have made me live and suffer too intensely—I am done for.

“ In these circumstances, the idea of a long voyage and a transplanted life fills me with fear. As you know, I cannot endure an active life, and—just think of it !—I have never travelled further than St Germain’s ! Besides, women age so quickly in the sun, and you would not be thirty when I should be as yellow and wrinkled as Mamma Pilar. You would then begrudge me your sacrifice, and poor Fanny would have to pay for it all.

“ Listen, there is an Eastern country—I read of it in one of your ‘ Tour du Monde ’—where, if a woman deceives her husband, they sew her up alive with a cat in a raw hide, throwing the bundle, howling and struggling, on the shore in the blazing sun. The woman shrieks, the cat claws—it is a death struggle between the two—and the skin shrinks and contracts on this horrible fight of prisoners, until the last groan, and the last trembling of the sack. This would be our fate——”

He stopped a minute—crushed and stupefied. As far as eye could see the blue sea sparkled.

"Addio," struck up the harps, and joining with them, another voice as hot and passionate :

"Addio."

' The emptiness of the ruined life, laid waste, wretched and mournful, rose up before his eyes ; the field was bare, he had reaped as he had sown, without hope for the future—and all for this woman who was slipping away from him !

" I ought to have told you this sooner, but dared not. You were so determined, so resolved. Your enthusiasm ran away with me. Then there was my woman's vanity, my natural pride at having drawn you back to my side after a rupture. Still, at the bottom of my heart I felt there was something wanting—gone, exploded. How could it be otherwise after such shocks ? Do not imagine this is on account of the unhappy Flamant. For him, as for you and all the others, it is finished, my heart is dead : but there remains the child, whom I cannot put from me, and who leads me back to the father, the poor man who ruined himself for love, and who came back to me ~~for~~ Mazas as ardent and tender as at our first

meeting. Only fancy, when we came together again, he passed the whole night weeping on my shoulder ; you see there was nothing much to worry about.

“ I have told you, my dear boy, I have loved too much, am broken. In the future I need someone to love me in my turn, to worship me, to admire me, to soothe me. He will be always at my feet, will never notice a wrinkle or a grey hair ; and, if he marries me, as he intends to do, it will be a favour on my part.

“ Look at both pictures !

“ Above all—no folly ! I have taken steps to prevent you finding me again. From the little railway cafe, where I am writing, I can see, through the trees the house where we have had such happy and such cruel times—the bill is in the window inviting new tenants. You are free ; you will never hear of me again !

“ Good-bye, one kiss, the last, on the neck—sweetheart !——”

